

Prologue/The Curse

A cold wind blew across the desolated land. A 30-year-old Harry Potter stood in the Headmasters office of what was left of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. The castle had been the target of many attacks. The war had raged on for over 10 years after Harry had graduated. He had finally brought the war to an end just 4 months ago. He had defeated Voldemort nearly a year ago, but it took the next 8 months to finish rounding up the last of the Death Eaters.

Now the Wizarding World was on the path to recovery. Harry just wondered if there was anything worth saving. The Wizarding and Muggle populations of Great Britain were severely depleted. The Ministry and Muggle governments were just barely hanging on. Thousands of children were left as orphans, hundreds of families were completely eradicated, and even more people were severely injured, and their lives would never be the same.

Harry's life would never be the same. Everyone he had ever cared about was now dead. They had ALL died for HIM! HE was supposed to be the only casualty. NOT his friends and family. That was why he now found himself in this office arguing with a portrait.

"I HAVE to try this Albus!"

"This is very Dark Magik, Harry. The repercussions could be...severe."

"No kidding, Albus!" came the sarcastic reply "I kinda figured that out when I inherited over 60 years of Dark Arts knowledge!"

It was true. Something strange had happened in the Final Battle. As Harry had cast the fatal curse, destroying the final part of Voldemort's soul, a bright light arose from his ashes, and struck Harry right on the forehead. It seemed to absorb right into his scar, before rendering him unconscious. He woke up two days later back in 'Order' Headquarters. When he awoke, he felt...different. He had memories that weren't his, powers he didn't recognize, and knew spells he had

never heard of. Somehow, all of Voldemort's powers, memories, and skills had transferred to him.

"I just don't think you know exactly what you're getting yourself into."

"I'm getting a second chance, Albus. If this works, I can drastically change the last 20 years, and DON'T give me

that song and dance about messing with the timeline. Frankly, it needs to be meddled with." Harry was angry.

"But for Voldemort to be alive again..."

Harry rubbed his eyes. "Albus, please. We've been over this for the last 3 months. I'm doing this. I WON'T be stopped now!"

With that, he stepped into a pre drawn Pentagram, surrounded by a series of intricate ancient runes.

"Goodbye, Albus. Hopefully the next time I see you, it will be under better circumstances."

He started chanting, and within minutes, he was surrounded by a swirl of magical energy. With one final gesture, he pointed his wand at himself, and uttered the fatal curse.

"AVADA KEDAVRA"

A Dream?

A 10-year-old Harry Potter was asleep under the cupboard under the stairs at 4 Privet Drive. Suddenly, he was thrust into a dream. A bright white light shone around him. Then he heard a voice.

“Haarry. Harry.”

“Hello.” he responded “Who are you?”

The face of a man appeared in front of him. He took a good look. He was older, but he looked a lot like...him.

“Dad?”

The man smiled, but shook his head.

“No Harry. I’m not your father.”

The voice was strong, but the boy could hear the sadness behind it.

“But you look like me. Who are you?”

The man sighed. “I’m you, Harry. From the future.”

“Bu...But, how?”

“I’m a wizard, Harry. You’re a wizard.”

“A wizard? But magic doesn’t exist. Uncle Vernon said so.”

The man rolled his eyes.

“Oh, but it does, Harry. It’s inside you. Inside us. You’re special, Harry. Your...our parents were a witch and wizard. Extremely powerful ones. They went to a special school called Hogwarts. You’ll be going there as well, and I’m here to help you. I’ve lived the life you’re about to embark on, and I’m here to make sure history DOES NOT repeat itself. I’ve sent my...well...mind or essence back in time. It will meld

with yours, and once it does, I swear that you will understand everything.”

The young Harry was extremely confused. He was still trying to wrap his mind around the fact that he was a wizard. He asked the only question he could think of.

“Will it hurt?” he asked timidly.

That made the man laugh.

“No, it won’t.” he chuckled “Are you ready?”

The younger Harry just shrugged. Another laugh.

The white mist started to swirl around them, and slowly Harry’s world went black.

THE DURSLEYS

Harry woke up a few hours later. He took a quick evaluation. He was in his 11-year-old body, but he had his 30-year-old mind, not to mention all of Voldemort’s memories and knowledge. He wondered if he still had all of his and Tom’s powers. He knew he couldn’t run the risk of performing a spell, and having the ministry detect it. Then he thought of a loophole. He could perform a temporary anti-magic detection spell, just around him in the cupboard. That would not only prove if he still had his powers, but it would allow him to check the extent of his powers.

Instinctively, he reached for his wand. ‘Wait, he didn’t have his wand yet. Oh well, at least he was an expert at wand-less magic. At least he hoped he still was. He raised his hand.

‘Shieldus Magikus Detection’

A powerful light covered him, before fading into the walls.

‘YES!’

He still had all of his and Voldemort's powers and skills. He waved his hand again, this time over an old pair of socks, and transfigured it into a small golden snitch, that started fluttering around the small space. 'Good' he could still do the simple stuff, as well.

At that moment, his aunt started banging on the door.

"Up, Get up! NOW!"

'Ugh!' He hadn't been in this house for over 10 years, and now he was back, and ready to cast an incineration charm on the infernal place.

He slowly got up, and put on his glasses. It felt strange wearing them again. He had performed a vision correcting spell during his 7th year, and had never had problems since. He would have to perform the spell again, but not now. Now, he had to keep up appearances.

Today was his birthday, and he would be receiving his Hogwarts letter. (A/N: I know that this does not follow the book, but for this story, it works.) This time, he wouldn't have any problems receiving it, and Hagrid wouldn't have to come rescue him off that horrid little island.

He only took a minute to do what he needed to, before making his way to the kitchens. His aunt immediately made him finish cooking breakfast. Breakfast passed quickly, then his uncle told him to go and get the post. Without argument, he quickly slipped out of the room. He only stopped at his cupboard to pick up one item.

He picked up the mail, and stuck his letter in his back pocket. He then, quietly, opened the door, and silently summoned the owl that had delivered the letter.

"Hey boy." he cooed softly, as he gently stroked the majestic barn owl, and fed it a small piece of toast he'd slipped in his pocket

"Here. Take this back to Hogwarts."

The owl hooted in understanding, and gently nipped Harry's finger in thanks for the bread, before flying away.

Harry had already written out his response, and that he would board the train on September 1st. If his plans were to work, he didn't need Dumbledore, Hagrid, or anyone else to come check up on him.

He closed the door, dropped his letter off in the cupboard, then made his way back to the kitchen. He handed the mail to his Uncle, and then sat back down. Breakfast continued for a few more minutes, before Harry decided to just jump right into this conversation.

"Uncle Vernon."

It was still strange hearing his 11-year-old voice. His uncle just grunted at him.

"Uncle Vernon." He tried again.

His uncle looked up.

"WHAT?!" he asked harshly "Can't you see I'm trying to read?!" indicating the paper

"I just wanted to let you know that I'm going into London today, and Aunt Petunia's coming with me." he stated calmly, before taking a sip of his orange juice.

All conversation at the table stopped, and the three of them were staring at him, disbelieving he had the audacity to make such a statement.

Vernon looked livid, and Dudley looked excited at the chance to witness his dad wailing on Harry.

"And just why do you think you need to go into London, and what makes you think your Aunt would go with you?!" Vernon ground out

Harry remained calm.

"Well, I need to go into London to get my school supplies. As you know, I'm a wizard, and I got my letter to Hogwarts today. As for Aunt

Petunia, she's technically my legal guardian, and I need her...assistance...on some business matters."

He sat back, and let his words take effect. He wasn't disappointed. His Aunt and Uncle's faces went ashen white, while Dudley just looked confused. His uncle found his voice first, sorta.

"How...how...do you know...?"

Harry sighed. "That doesn't matter." Harry now took the commanding tone he had acquired from his years of leading 'troops' into battle.

"Like HELL it doesn't!"

"It DOESN'T! Now, are we going to do this the easy way or the hard way?"

"YOU WILL NOT BE GOING!" his uncle screeched

Harry sighed. "That's what I thought."

He jumped from his seat, as his uncle lunged at him. Without another thought, he quickly and silently cast another magic shielding charm before simultaneously casting three 'Imperius Curses'. Okay, so it was an unforgivable, but he really had no qualms about using it against his relatives.

All of his relatives were calm now, well subdued.

"Sit Down." He ordered.

They instantly obeyed. After everything they had put him through, he felt a guilty pleasure of seeing them like this.

"Alright, now I can't run the risk of any unwanted attention. Vernon..." reverting back to his adult use of first names, he would have to be careful about that. "You go to work, and act normally. Dudley, you go about your normal routine, oh, but you can't beat up anyone." He figured he might as well make his cousin a bit nicer, even if just

temporarily. “And Aunt Petunia, go get ready, and meet me in the living room in 15 minutes.”

No one moved. “NOW!” Harry ordered

With that, Vernon and Dudley quickly walked out the door, and Petunia made her way up the stairs. Harry leaned back and smiled. This was going much better then the first time.

Okay, I know the shielding spell is COMPLETELY bogus, but I wrote it, got reviews on it, and decided not to change it. It really has no bearing on the rest of the story, and it won't be seen again.

Anyway, thanks for reading.

Midnight Star 25

Diagon Alley

20 minutes later, Harry apparated himself and his subdued aunt to the apparition point next to the Leaky Cauldron. He didn't want the same reception he had received last time, so before going in, he charmed his hair a light brown, and charmed his hair to cover his scar.

He walked into the crowded pub, quickly dragging his aunt along, and successfully avoiding Tom, the barkeeper.

As the gateway opened, Harry took in the simple beauty that was Diagon Alley. People hustling and bustling, running their errands without fear. Unconcerned with the possible threat of a Death Eater attack. No death or destruction. No bodies or blood filling the streets. Well, Harry was determined NOT to let history repeat itself!

He dragged his aunt up the steps of Gringotts, and made his way to the Head Goblin. He bowed low, and in perfect Gobbledegook said,

"Greetings Superior Master Goblin. May your gold flow abundantly. I humbly request an audience with Senior Goblin Griphook from the house of Elik."

The Head Goblin was stunned. Not only did this...child...greet him in such a formal fashion. Hardly anyone remembered the old ways, much less practiced them. But also addressed him in his own language. Gobbledegook was such a difficult language to learn, that most wizards didn't even bother, and to find both in someone so young...He sensed that there was much more to this boy than met the eye.

In the same language. "Of course, young sir. And who may I say is inquiring?"

"Harry James Potter and his Guardian."

The Goblin did a double take.

"Of course. Come this way."

He led them to a small office.

“Please take a seat.”

They both sat, and a moment later, a middle aged goblin appeared. Harry stood, and respectfully bowed. Then continuing in Gobbledegook.

“Greetings, Senior Master Griphook. May your gold flow freely and abundantly.”

The goblin was taken aback, but immediately replied.

“And to you Master Potter. May your gold and wisdom be multiplied in abundance.”

“Thank you.” Harry replied, switching back to English, as they took their seats.

“Now to business.” said Harry firmly. “I’m here to take charge of my family vaults and estates. I know that you’re the keeper of the Potter and Evans Family Vaults.”

The Goblin nodded. “That’s correct Mr. Potter but those vaults are under your guardian’s jurisdiction until you come of age.”

“I understand that. That’s why my guardian is here today. She can sign papers releasing custody to me, can she not?”

The goblin was surprised. It was a statement, not a question.

“Yes...” he answered hesitantly, “but to release it to one so young...”

Harry put up a hand to silence him. “Oh, but I’m not so young. I’m well beyond the age of this body.”

Griphook looked confused. “What do you mean, Mr. Potter?”

Harry sighed. "I will need a Goblin's Oath not to reveal anything I'm about to tell you, without my express permission. In return, I will give you a Wizard's Oath that everything I'm about to tell you is 100 true."

The goblin looked surprised, but agreed. After they had both made their oaths, Harry cast a 'muffliato' spell on his aunt. She may have been 'imperioed', but she could still hear.

"Was that wandless magic? The goblin asked calmly

"Yes." Harry responded simply

The goblin just nodded. "Is she under the Imperius Curse?"

"Yes."

"Did you perform it?"

"Yes."

"Hmm. Then I'd say you do have an interesting story to tell."

Harry chuckled. "Well, I'll let you be the judge of that. For starters, I want to assure you that I truly am Harry James Potter."

He waved his hand over his head. His hair changed from brown to its natural black, and he pushed his hair to the side to reveal his scar. The goblin just looked at it, but didn't interrupt.

"The next thing I want to make clear, is that while this body may be 11-years-old, my mind is not. My mind is from 20 years into the future. Ultimately, I have the mind of a 30-year-old.

Griphook raised a curious eyebrow. "And just what spell did you use to accomplish this?"

"Commuto Historia."

The Goblins eyes got wide. "That was extremely dangerous, Mr. Potter. May I ask why you felt the need to resort to such extremes?"

Harry pointed to his forehead.

Griphook paled slightly. "The Dark Lord then?"

Harry nodded. "Yes, In my timeline, he comes back in less than 4 years of today."

Griphook paled even more, but didn't interrupt.

"After that, the Second War breaks out. It'll start off slow, but it'll quickly escalate. What's worse is that it'll go on for nearly 15 years."

Griphook now shrunk back in his seat. He had no doubt that the boy's words were true. Aside from his oath to only speak the truth, he spoke with such conviction, yet grief filled his words.

"Both the magical and muggle worlds will be devastated. NO ONE will be left untouched, even those parties who typically remain neutral."

Griphook was still pale, but he had found his voice. "So what was the outcome?" he asked quietly.

Harry sighed. "In the end, I finally defeated him, but not before there were thousands upon thousands of casualties."

"You? You defeated him?" Griphook asked calmly.

Harry nodded. "I'm the only one who can, and I WILL, again. I WON'T let history repeat itself!"

Griphook nodded in understanding. He felt sorry for the boy in front of him. This was such a horrible burden to place on a child, well on anyone for that matter. But he had to remember that this wasn't truly a child. He lived with the memories of a 30-year-old, plus the horrors of a 15 year war.

"Thank you for trusting me, Mr. Potter. I will be of service to you in any way I can."

Harry gave a slight bow.

“Thank you, Griphook. I know I can trust you. You were one of my most loyal and faithful advisors and friends during the war. I hope we can have that same friendship this time around.”

Griphook was taken aback. It was very rare for a goblin to become close to a wizard. Goblins typically tended to keep to their own kind.

“Thank you, Mr. Potter. I hope so too.”

Harry smiled. “Good. Now, down to business. Do you think we could start with those papers to release the vaults? I want everything completely legal.”

“Of course, Mr. Potter, but I warn you, your aunt can’t be under the ‘Imperius’ while she signs, otherwise it won’t be legal.”

“Yes, I already knew that.”

“Very well.” He flicked his wand, (A/N: Yes, Goblins have wands. I know they’re not supposed to, but...well, you’ll see why in future chapters) and a stack of papers appeared on the desk.

For the next 20 minutes, Harry spent filing out paper after paper. He knew this would be a paperwork nightmare, but he didn’t want to leave any loopholes or for there to be anyway for the Ministry or Dumbledore to try anything underhanded, and he knew they were both capable of it.

For the most part, the Ministry was a bunch of idiots, with a few exceptions, and past Albus’ grandfatherly exterior, was a manipulative, extremely powerful force to be reckoned with. Luckily, Harry knew what he was getting into this time. He knew Albus’ intentions were ‘for the greater good’, but sometimes the ‘greater good’ was far from the right choice.

Harry finally finished filling out his part of the paperwork. Now came the hard part. Convincing Aunt Petunia to sign, without the influence

of magic. He silently removed the curse. She blinked a couple of times, as if coming out of a daze.

“Hello, Aunt Petunia.” He said evenly

Her eyes darted around, like a scared cat. “Where...where am I?” she whispered fearfully.

“In the Magical World.” He answered simply. “Don’t worry. No one’s here to hurt you.”

She didn’t look convinced.

He sighed. “Look, I just need you to sign a few things.”

“How...did I get here?” her voice was still fearful. Then she noticed Griphook. “What’s THAT?!” she gasped

Harry groaned. “That’s Griphook. He’s a goblin, and a very good friend of mine, so be nice.” He felt like he was talking to a 2-year-old.

Petunia paled when she heard the word ‘goblin’.

“Now, could you please sign? The sooner you do, the sooner we can get out of here.” He pushed the pile of papers in front of her, and handed her a quill.

“Uh, wh...what are they?”

Harry sighed again. “Let’s just say, that as soon as you sign them, I won’t be yours or Uncle Vernon’s problem any more.”

Her eyes got wide. “Really?” she asked quietly

Harry rolled his eyes. How tactful. “Yes, really.”

“But that man wrote in the letter...”

“Yes, yes. I know what he wrote. He was wrong. Now, do you want me out of your hair or not?” he asked annoyed. He handed her the quill again.

She sighed. “Where do I sign?”

Harry pointed out all of the places for her to sign and initial. After everything was in order, Harry looked at her.

“Thank you.” He stated simply. “I think this is the first decent thing you’ve ever done for me. Now, ‘Imperio’.” And, once again, she was back in his zen-like state.

“Well,...” Griphook spoke up. “I think that takes care of everything. The originals will be kept in our files, and a copy will be sent to the Ministry.”

Harry nodded. “Good. After this, I’ll need to go down to the vaults and pick up a few things, but right now, I have one more item I need to discuss.”

“Oh, and what might that be.”

“A business opportunity.”

Griphook raised a curious eyebrow.

“I want to start a company.” Harry clarified “I know that the Potter vaults alone, are a multi-billion galleon account, and have daily deposits to it, with all the investments in the Potter name. I also know how many estates we have throughout Europe. Throw in the Evans accounts and investments; it’s one of the wealthiest accounts in all of Europe. Start up costs should be no problem, and if I’m right, our projected earnings should substantially increase our holdings over the next few years.”

“Exactly what type of company would this be?”

“Well, it’s kind of hard to explain. It’s a...variety. It won’t have one simple focus area, but it will have one main goal.”

“Oh, and what would that be?”

“To reach out to the magical and muggle community, and try to mold them together, at least in a way.”

“Interesting...but that’s not a very clear description.”

“Let me try to explain. Staff. As far as it’s concerned, I want a wide variety. I have a few specific people in mind, but I’m going to need help selecting others. I’d like to ask you to be my ‘point man’ on this, but it’s a huge undertaking, and despite my knowledge, I still have an 11-year-old body. There may be some...snags along the way.”

Griphook looked at him seriously. “I said I would help you in any way possible. I won’t go back on that promise.”

Harry smiled. “Thank you. As I said, I know I can trust you. I need people I can trust on this. Now, here are the plans for the company.”

For the next 30 minutes, Harry laid out the exact plans he had for this company. When he finally got through the major details, Griphook sat back, and whistled.

“Boy, you really have given this a lot of thought. Mass producing Wolf’s Bane and Vampire Serum, yet still looking for a cure, setting up safe houses for squibs and muggle born children who are thrown out or abused, classes on the magical world for muggleborns or muggle raised children before they start Hogwarts, and more. It’s ingenious. When you said ‘variety’, you sure meant it.” Griphook was impressed, and it showed in his voice.

“Yes I did. Now let’s start with the staff. First off, I need to find someone to be my eyes and ears, as well as the face of the company, especially when I’m at school. Someone who is...somewhat... Light, and will be completely loyal to me and to the company. I’m thinking a Half-Blood or Muggleborn Wizard, mid thirties to early forties, somewhat handsome and professional. Someone people will take seriously. It’d be good if he had a background in business, but not completely necessary, depending on who it is. Oh, and someone I

could share my secret with. Do you think you could find someone like that?"

Griphook was hastily making notes on his pad. "I'll get started right away. You also said you had a few people in mind."

"Yes, there's a few people I definitely want on staff, and most of them, I don't think we'll have a problem convincing." Harry handed him a list of names, and waited a moment while he looked over them.

"Very interesting combination of people you have here. I recognize several of the names."

"I figured you would. To start off, I want the company to be divided into 5 different Departments. I want Arthur Weasley as Head of the Muggle Relations Department. It'll be broken up into several subdivisions, including one for the classes for muggleborns, and another one for the safe houses. They'll also have to be prepared to deal with the muggle police, children's services, and hospitals. I'd like to see if we can't find witches or wizards already working in those areas. If not, I want to get people in there, and in positions of authority, so we won't be met with a lot of 'red tape'."

Griphook stopped making notes for a second to give him a curious look.

Harry chuckled. "Sorry, muggle expression. I just don't want to be met with a lot of resistance or problems."

Griphook nodded, and continued writing.

"Next, I want Remus Lupin as Head of the Magical Creatures Relations. That will also be subdivided, mostly by the different groups we'd deal with; Werewolves, Vampires, Veelas, Leprechauns, Goblins, Centaurs, Giants, and probably a few others. I want us to cater to their individual needs. Wolfs Bane, Vampire Serum, Anti-Sensuating Potion for Veelas, Temporary Growth Potion for Leprechauns, Temporary Shrinking Potion for Giants, and anything else they might need that others don't readily or affordably supply."

“Okay, Muggles, Magical Creatures. What next?”

“Finances. I’d like you to be the Head there, if that’s okay. You wouldn’t have to leave Gringotts. I think you can manage it just like any other account here, but I would like you to select several young, trustworthy goblins for the everyday work, to work directly at the company. I’d, also, like to mix a few wizards and magical creatures in every department, including that one, but the Goblins will be in charge.”

“Now, for Security. The person I’d like to have is Alastor Moody as Head, but, unfortunately, he’s too close and loyal to Dumbledore.”

This made Griphook stop writing. “You don’t trust Dumbledore?” he asked a little surprised

Harry shook his head. “It’s not that I don’t trust him, it’s more that I don’t trust his judgment. He’s a good man, don’t get me wrong, and he will always fight for the Light, but some of his...beliefs...are misguided, and they eventually lead to his own death. I’m determined to change that as well.”

Griphook nodded. “So, do you have anyone else in mind?”

“Well...only for one of the subdivisions. I want Bill Weasley for the Curse-Breaking Division. He actually works for Gringotts as a curse breaker.”

“Yes, I think I’ve heard the name. He’s good.”

“Yes, he is, and he’ll only get better, but he doesn’t have as much experience yet, as I’d like. That’ll change with time and practice. I’d like you to find a few other candidates for Head of the Department, oh, and before I forget, as Head of Finance, you will be salaried.”

Griphook bowed. “That’s very kind, but...”

Harry put up a hand to stop him. “I wouldn’t have it any other way. Now, as far as location goes, I’m thinking Downtown London. I’d like to get a good sized office building; minimum of 10-stories. To the

muggle world, I want us to appear as a perfectly legitimate muggle business, but of course we'll be dealing with everything magical."

"Oh, and one Department I touched on, but didn't fully explain. The Research Department; that department will not only cover potions, but spells and shields, wards, curses; anything that can be enhanced, improved, or made easier. There's a Potion's Master by the name of Henri Estaba in France, I met during the war. He's a true genius when it comes to potions. He may take a bit of convincing, but I think it's manageable."

"I've also made a list of several young people, most just a few years out of Hogwarts, who will grow with the company, who will have real talent in their fields. Several Auror trainees, Healer trainees, a couple in security and wards, a few curse breakers, a few in Potions, as well as brains in Transfiguration, Herbology, and Defense against the Dark Arts. I want young people who will grow with the company, and remain loyal to it, and to me, but I need the ones with age and experience to mentor and show them the ropes."

"Oh, and one other little detail; the Ministry. I want this company completely free from Ministry jurisdiction. Also, every single employee must sign a magically binding contract, swearing, among other things, that they will never pass on any of the company's secrets or information that isn't public knowledge to anyone outside the company, especially the Ministry, Voldemort, competition, or anyone else. If they do, it will be blatantly obvious that it was them, to themselves, and everyone around them."

Harry had gotten this idea from Hermione when she had charmed the DA list during 5th year. Harry let Griphook finish writing before speaking again.

"I know that's a lot of information, but I trust you can handle it. Do you have any questions?"

"Just one for now. Have you thought of a name for the company?"

Harry grinned. "Yeah, I have. See if you can figure this out. 'The Mark of Unity Foundation'."

Griphook thought for a moment. "Well, the 'Unity' parts obvious, but what about the 'Mark'? Does it have to do with your scar?"

Harry applauded. "Very good. Yes, the word mark is a synonym for scar, but it also refers to how Voldemort 'marked me as his equal. I think it holds its meaning, without being too obvious."

"I like it. Very creative. Is there anything else I need to know?"

"I think that's more than enough for now. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to send me an owl. Oh, but please place security charms on it. I know it's really unnecessary at this time, but...well...let's just say it's a consequence of war."

"Of course, Mr. Potter..."

"Just Harry, please."

"Very well, then, Harry. I think it might be wise to open up a new vault, and simply transfer in the start-up funds."

Harry nodded. "That's probably best, and can we put it under the company's name. For now, I don't want my name in anyway associated with the company, at least not for a few years."

Griphook nodded. "We'll have to put a false name as the underlying owner, whatever alias you choose to use when dealing with the company."

Harry agreed. "Can we get started on that paperwork as well?"

Harry and Griphook spent the next several hours opening the vault, and working on a few other details. Harry finally bid him goodbye, and requested a trip to his family vaults. Aside from funds for his school supplies, he also picked up a several items he planned to use in the near future, as well as several sentimental items he had discovered in his last timeline, including a dragon pendent that had belonged to his father and was endowed with several powerful protection charms, a small diary that had belonged to his mother, and several photo

albums of his parents, and the rest of the Marauders, their friends, and, of course, him.

He and his aunt finally made their way out of the bank. It was now early afternoon. Harry decided to get his shopping done quickly.

His first stop was at a magical luggage shop, where he proceeded to purchase a very special, very expensive trunk, much like the one the false Moody had possessed in his 4th year. It had 5 compartments, all of them with expanding charms, capable of expanding to any desired size. It had some of the most sophisticated locking charms on it, and Harry planned to add a few extra he had personally come up with.

After that, he quickly made his way through the potions ingredients shop, Flourish and Blotts, Madame Malkin's, and so on, each place, picking up much more than mere 1st year stuff. He also made a quick stop at the Owl Emporium, and succeeded in securing his Snowy familiar. He was overjoyed to see her.

"Hey girl." He cooed. "I've missed you."

His last stop was going to be interesting. 'Olivanders'. He quietly walked into the store, instructing his aunt to wait outside. He didn't want Olivander getting too close a look at her, afraid he might recognize the signs of the 'Imperius'.

"Hello." He called out.

Just like before, Olivander's head appeared from behind the shelves.

"Ah, I wondered when I'd be seeing you Mr. Potter." Yep, same old Olivander. "Now, which is your wand hand?"

Harry shrugged. "I can use both when writing." he answered innocently. It was true, but he could also use both in dueling, and he normally dueled with two wands, as it was.

“Interesting.” The tape measure dropped after a few moments, and the long process of trying wand after wand began, until Olivander finally pulled HIS wand off the shelf.

“Try this.”

Harry happily reached for his wand, and a burst of gold and green sparks shot out of it.

Olivander clapped, although Harry could tell that he was a bit disturbed by the interesting mix of colors. “Excellent. Curious though, very curious.”

Harry knew it was inevitable. He had to ask. “What’s curious?”

Olivander said the exact same thing as the last time around, about it being the brother to the one that had given him his scar, and that we can expect great things from him. Harry paid for the wand, and quickly exited the store, glad to be away from there.

He knew that Olivander would immediately Owl Dumbledore about his wand, but it didn’t bother him. So what if Albus knew he had Voldemort’s brother wand. He already knew about the prophecy. He had killed Voldemort once. He would do it again. They stopped in the Leaky Cauldron for lunch, before Harry apparated them and all his stuff back to Privet Drive.

Dudley was already home, but Vernon wasn’t. Harry put Petunia and Dudley to work in the kitchen fixing Supper. He figured they need to do something productive together, a little bonding experience.

Meanwhile, Harry got to work on some of the additional paperwork for the ‘Foundation’. He had one month to get everything jump started before he would be back at school, and under the annoyingly watchful eye of one Albus Dumbledore.

The next few days were, perhaps, some of the most stress free he had ever experienced at the Dursleys. His ‘family’ was actually quite pleasant under the ‘Imperius’, but he knew he couldn’t stay there. He needed a place for his Base of Operations. Somewhere close to the

location he desired for his business, Downtown London. He could only think of one place. He also needed to brew potions and practice his spell work without Ministry detection or interference. So, he made up his mind. He would go back...back to # 12 Grimmauld Place.

A/N: Just a note on the spell. Commuto Historia is Latin. Roughly translated it means 'To Alter History'

If you have any other questions, please don't hesitate to include them in a review.

Thanks.

Midnight Star 25

A NEW HOME

After 2 days with the Dursleys, he decided it was time to leave his 'family' for good. All of his stuff was packed and shrunk. He was ready to leave, as soon as he took the 'Imperius' off them.

The Dursleys were sitting around the breakfast table, when Harry came in. With a wave of his hand, the curse was lifted. All three Dursleys blinked from their daze, just as Aunt Petunia had in Diagon Alley. Vernon was the first to find his voice.

"WHAT DID YOU DO TO US, BOY?!" His voice was full of rage.

"I told you we could have done this the easy way, but I highly doubt you'll ever change. I can't say it's been fun or even pleasant, but you'll never have to deal with me again." Harry's voice was calm and smooth.

"WAIT, you're leaving?!"

Harry nodded. "After today, I'm no longer your problem."

"Where are you going?" he asked sharply

"To MY WORLD!" Harry snapped "Not that you care! If anyone comes looking for me, just tell them the truth. You have no idea where I've gone. Any Questions?!"

No one said anything.

"Good. Well, I WON'T be seeing you."

And with that, he popped out.

Grimmauld Place

He reappeared at the apparition point in the backyard of number 12 Grimmauld Place. Surprisingly, he could see the house without any problems, and as he walked to the backdoor, he felt the wards recognize him. He guessed Sirius must of keyed him in as an infant.

As he entered the house, a stale stench met his nostrils. After all, this house had been boarded up for nearly 5 years. He started opening the windows to air out the house. Then his first problem showed up.

“Who’s there?” came a crackly, old voice.

‘Kreacher’. ‘Ugh!’ He turned to the old house-elf. “Hello, Kreacher.”

Kreacher gave him a look. “Who are you?”

“A family friend.” He said simply

“What does that mean?” Kreacher groaned

Harry closed his eyes. Time to put his acting skills to work, and take advantage of his current status as an 11-year-old.

“Well, my family was friends with Bellatrix Black. She said that if they ever needed a safe place to stay, that the kind Mistress Black might be able to help us.”

Kreacher’s curiosity was perked. “You know Mistress Bellatrix?”

Harry shook his head. “No, but my family did. They always spoke very highly of her. So, is Mistress Black here?”

Kreacher looked sullen. “Mistress Black is no longer alive.”

Harry pretended to look sympathetic. “Oh, I’m sorry. Does anyone else live here?”

Kreacher shook his head. “No, but as long as Mistresses horrible son is still alive, I’m bound to the most Noble House of Black!”

Harry had to bite back his desired response to that comment about Sirius. Instead, he said, “Do you think it would be alright if I stayed here for a while? I don’t really have anywhere else to go, and there are a lot of bad people after me.” reverting to a scared child’s voice.

Kreacher gave him a funny look. "What do you mean?"

"Well, you see, my family was...was pureblood, and my parents stood up for pureblood superiority. But...but...they were killed a few weeks ago, by people who didn't like what they were saying. His voice was starting to crack, and he began shedding fake tears. "Now they're after me too." He sniffed.

"So you're a pureblood?" questioned the house-elf.

Harry rolled his eyes. Of course that would be all that Kreacher would care about. Harry just nodded.

"Then I guess you can stay here." relented Kreacher.

Harry faked a smile. "Oh, thank you!" said Harry in a relieved voice. "But...but, no one can know I'm here. Would...would you take an oath to never reveal my name or location to anyone?! Please! Please. As a favor to Mistress Bellatrix!?" his young voice was pleading.

Kreacher looked at him skeptically. "Well...just for Mistress Bellatrix."

"Oh, thank you! Mistress Black was lucky to have a friend like you." Harry was pouring on the charm, but it seemed to be working. Harry pulled out his wand. "My parents showed me how to do this. All you have to do is say 'I do'. Okay?"

The house-elf nodded. Harry was surprised that he had gotten him to agree so quickly, but he suspected that after 5-years of taking orders from a crazy portrait, he was more than a little befuddled and mad. He raised his wand.

"Do you, Kreacher, most faithful house elf to the most noble House of Black, swear to never reveal my name or location to anyone without my express permission, and be bound to me as you were bound to your late Mistress, and obey my orders?"

Harry grimaced, waiting for his plan to backfire, and the house-elf to refuse, but once again, he was surprised.

"I do." Kreacher replied.

Harry was surprised, but he quickly completed the spell. Now the house elf was bound to him. He wouldn't be able to reveal his location, and he now had to obey Harry's every order.

"Thank you, Kreacher. Now, I have a favor to ask. I'd like you to go and take down the frame for the portrait of Phineas Nigellus. Put it somewhere where he won't be able to visit the other portraits."

Harry knew that Kreacher had to obey his orders, and without a word, the house-elf went to do just that. Okay, 2 problems down. Now, the other problems he had to deal with were the portrait of Sirius' mother, and keeping his location a secret.

The portrait would be the easiest. For now, he would just place a silencing charm around the area. He would have to constantly renew it, but he didn't mind, as long as he didn't have to listen to all of that screaming.

Now, the problem of his location. He figured the easiest solution was to just cast the Fidelius Charm on the house, so...that's what he did, making himself the 'secret keeper'. Now, as long as he was in the house, no one would be able to get to him, unless he specifically told them.

Now came the hard part. Cleaning the house, and bound or not, Kreacher would not be any help. As he did a once over of the house, it looked much like he remembered, just dirtier.

He started with the one bedroom he wanted to occupy. The one he had shared with Ron and the twins the first time he had stayed here in his 5th year. Thinking about Ron and the twins made the memories come flooding back. The ones he had tried so hard to forget. The twins had died in an attack on Diagon Alley 3 years before the end of the war.

Ron had died mere months before Harry's final battle with Voldemort. They had finally located the last of Voldemort's newest Horcruxes, but Voldemort wasn't taking any chances. There was a huge trap

waiting for them, and Ron had been killed by none other than Bellatrix. She had taken more people away from him! If she hadn't have been in Azkaban at the moment, Harry wouldn't have hesitated to go and KILL her personally!

He felt his anger rising, and forced himself to take several calming breaths. He had a second chance. He could still save them. Nearly everyone he loved was still alive, and he planned on keeping it that way! His only regret was that he couldn't have gone back further to save his parents.

He let out a heavy sigh. He had to stay focused. He would see his friends in less then a month, but for now, he had work to do.

He spent the next 6 hours cleaning the main rooms he would be using; Kitchen, Bedroom, Dining Room, Bathroom, and Living Room. It was mid afternoon before he collapsed on the newly cleaned sofa. The room was only slightly less dreary, but Harry could change that.

Right now, décor was not on the top of his priority list. That space was occupied by two little words. 'Destroy Horcruxes'. He had found the locket, right where it was supposed to be. He couldn't destroy it yet. He needed to brew a particularly difficult potion."

He knew that Grimmauld Place had a huge basement Lab, and he had picked up most of the ingredients he needed in Diagon Alley, but there were a few...sensitive...items he would have to pick up in Knockturn Alley. He would need an aging potion for to go there. His body was still 11, after all.

He also wanted to brew several potions before he went back to Hogwarts. He knew that he could buy a lot of them, but the war had made him paranoid. During those years, it was literally a matter of life or death on who you trusted. Very little was safe. Food and water were contaminated, you didn't buy anything off the streets, and if you wanted a good or even safe potion, you had better brew it yourself.

Harry, along with many of his comrades, had become potion brewing experts, purely out of necessity. He was grateful now. That particular talent would come in extremely handy. Plus, he could have a lot of

fun with Snape. The bloody 'git' would no longer be the only Potions Master on the school.

He looked at the clock. It was too late to start brewing most of the potions, plus he knew that the lab would need a good cleaning. Well, since he was already filthy, he might as well finish with the lab.

He walked into the dusty library, and walked to a specific spot. He drew his wand, and ran it across a specific spot along the floor, and muttered the password. 'Pureblood Superiority'

A trap door appeared, and a set of steps led down to a huge potions lab. The equipment looked to be about 10 years out of date, but it was of good quality. If nothing else, the Black's could afford the best, and had fairly good taste.

He spent the rest of the afternoon making the lab bearable. It would take a few more cleanings before could be deemed truly clean.

Thoroughly exhausted, he made his way up to the bedroom, and collapsed onto the 4-poster bed. He was satisfied with his work today.

He reinforced his mental shields, just before drifting off. Spirit or not, he had no desire to allow Voldemort access to his mind or memories, not to mention...(well he wasn't sure man was the right word)...but the man's own memories, and then some. This was his last conscious thought, before surrendering to Morpheus.

A/N: Okay, not a super long chapter. Like I said up top, this was not my favorite one to write. I'm curious to know what you think about Kreacher. I tried to stay true to his character, but binding him to Harry may have been a little far fetched. Let me explain how I justify it as plausible.

--First off, Kreacher is still bound to Sirius. That didn't change. But he also bound to Harry now. The spell Harry used, used Harry's future status as Kreacher's master to seal the bond, once Kreacher agreed,

therefore the magic accepted the bond. Confusing, I know, but hey, its magic mixed with time travel. It's supposed to be confusing.

If you didn't like me throwing in Kreacher, well, don't worry, you won't be seeing much more of him. If you did, I'm really sorry. I may throw him in later chapters, but not anytime soon.

Glance at Next Chapter

Excellent choice, Griphook; Haven't you been dead for nearly 20 years?; In a word...BAD!; Watch you Brother Die!; I fulfilled that promise!

I'm going to try to get the next chapter up within the next 24-hours. Thanks for reading.

Midnight Star 25

Business Plans and A New Ally

The next 3 days passed quickly. Harry had done a great deal of cleaning, as well as brewing. He had made a lot of the basic potions that he had the ingredients for. He still needed to make a trip into Knockturn Alley. He had finished the aging potion. That would at least give him the height to appear as an adult. He didn't plan on showing his face anyway. He wasn't suicidal.

On the 4th morning, he received an owl from Griphook. He had located several available buildings for Harry to look at. He gave him the address of the real-estate agency he had set up an appointment with later that morning.

He had also selected a few people he thought could act on Harry's behalf as the face of the company. Harry wrote back his thanks, and that he would meet the agent, then stop by Gringotts later that afternoon.

It was about an hour 'till his appointment with the real-estate agent. He pulled out a vial of aging potion, downed it, and waited for the results. He wasn't disappointed. He was now 5' 10", and looked to be in his late 20's. He then transfigured his clothes into a sharp muggle business suit, charmed his hair a wavy chestnut brown, made sure it covered his scar, and changed his eyes to a bright blue.

30 minutes later, he apparated into a small alley, close to the address Griphook had given him. The real-estate agent was a pleasant middle-aged woman by the name of Christine Andrews. He introduced himself as Jacob Myers.

It turned out that she was a muggleborn witch, that had decided to continue in her family business, 'real-estate', after graduating from Hogwarts. She had acquired her real-estate license, but also worked closely with Gringotts, and they were able to send a great deal of business her way. Harry found her extremely pleasant and easy to talk to.

She said that she was surprised a purchase of this magnitude would interest someone at his age. He gave her the story that he was just representing the purchasing party.

She showed him several large office buildings in the Business District of Downtown London. All but one was currently empty, and available for immediate move in. Out of the 4 they looked at, Harry decided the best one was a large 16-story, right in the heart of Downtown London. It was only a few miles from St. Mungos, the layout of the offices were good, plus, it already had fireplaces on every floor, (A/N: Is that possible?) so all he would have to do is get the Floo hooked up, and he could make a controlled Apparation point on the top floor. It was far from the largest building around, but that was good. The last thing Harry wanted was too much attention.

They made their way back to the real-estate office, where Harry filled out the paperwork, and made a generous offer on the building. When everything was finished, Harry asked her to owl the results of the offer to Griphook at Gringotts. If it wasn't accepted, they would have to go with an alternative. She assured him she would. She had already faxed off the papers, and expected to have an answer within a few hours. Harry thanked her for all of her help, before making his way to Diagon Alley.

He had warned Griphook of the disguise he would take, and the time he would arrive. He transfigured the business suit into a set of black robes, arrived promptly, and Griphook met him, before leading him to his private office.

"Well, Harry. I have good news. I received an owl from Ms. Andrews 20 minutes ago, and the offers been accepted. Congratulations. You are now the proud owner of 1301 Eighty First Avenue, the new Headquarters of the 'Unity Foundation'."

Harry grinned at the goblin's theatrics.

"That's great. Do you have the paperwork to finalize payment?"

Griphook nodded, and handed over a manila folder. Griphook excused himself for a moment, while Harry finished filling out the papers.

When Griphook reentered, he was accompanied by a middle aged wizard. He looked to be in his late 30's to early 40's, neatly cut dark brown hair, and matching brown eyes. His facial features held a serious, and seemed vaguely familiar, although Harry couldn't place it, and he wore a set of professional business robes. His whole demeanor screamed 'business', which Harry liked, but that's not what he found interesting.

Ever since he had inherited Voldemort's powers, he found himself extremely sensitive to magic. He sensed a glamour charm around this man, and a powerful one at that. 'Hmm, what did he have to hide?'

Harry immediately entered his mind. What he found made him take a second look. 'Well, Well, Well!' He dived a bit deeper, before he found himself forcibly thrown out.

When he regained his bearings, a wand was pointed at his throat. Harry just chuckled.

"Excellent choice, Griphook. I think we may have found our man."

The stranger was taken aback by this man's attitude.

"Who are you?" the stranger ground out

"The better question, Mr. Lawson, is who are you? Or should I say Mr. Prewett? Fabian Prewett to be more precise."

The man paled.

"Don't worry, Mr. Prewett. I have no intention of revealing you, but I am curious. I was under the impression that you've been dead for the last 20 years. You kicked me out before I got out that far. Very impressive on that, by the way. Very few can even detect me, much less that quickly...if they can at all. Please, take a seat."

He growled, but complied.

“Who are you, boy, and how do you know me?”

“Well, I don’t know you, but I know your sister, Molly, well sorta.”

“How do you know my sister?” he asked sharply

“That’s...a story in itself. Let’s start with why you’re here. Did Griphook explain the position?”

Fabian frowned at the change of subject, but decided to answer.

“Partially, but it didn’t make a lot of sense. I’d be representing the owner of a new company, who wishes to remain anonymous, as well as being the face of the company?”

Harry nodded. “You’d also be responsible for the day to day operations of the business, but you would report directly to the owner, and every major decision will have to be cleared by the owner. Do you have any business experience Mr. Prewett, or do you prefer Mr. Lawson?”

Fabian sighed. “I haven’t been called Prewett in nearly 20 years.”

Harry nodded in understanding. “Richard Lawson it is.”

“And what do I call you? I’m guessing Jacob Myers isn’t your real name.”

Harry smiled. “That would be correct, but we’ll get to my identity in a moment.”

“And I take it that you’re the owner in question, and I’d be answering to you?”

“That’s right.”

“Hmm?”

“Now, Mr. Lawson, I truly am curious as to why you decided to go into hiding 20 years ago. I know that you and your brother were original Order of the Phoenix members; some of Albus’ first recruits, if I’m not mistaken. Then you were supposedly killed nearly 20 years ago in a Death Eater attack. What’s the story?”

Fabian sighed heavily. “How do you know all this? Okay,...you’re right. We were original Order members. My brother and I were spies for the Order.” Harry raised an eyebrow, but didn’t interrupt. “We were never Death Eaters. We refused to sink that low. But the Prewett family is one of the oldest and most respected Pureblood names. We practically grew up with the family’s that joined Voldemort. We were in the perfect position to infiltrate their inner circle, and we did. We passed information to the Order for over 2 years, before we were found out. It was actually because we refused to take the Dark Mark.

“We then had to go on the run, but before we could go into hiding...there was a surprise attack. My...brother was killed that night, and I was on the brink of death. I had been beaten, stabbed, crucioed, among other dark curses, but they didn’t AK me. I was unconscious, so I guess they thought I was dead. When I awoke, my brother was dead, and the house lay in ruins. I barely had enough strength to move, but I forced myself to get up. I transfigured the body of one of the Death Eaters we’d killed to look like me and make it look like I had died as well. I knew that my family was still in danger, and even more so if I was found alive.”

“So,...I disappeared, and lived in France for several years before coming back to England under the alias of Richard Lawson, a muggleborn French wizard. I’ve lived in Muggle England for the last 15 years. I worked in a muggle financial firm for several years, before I started working free-lance for Gringotts. And now, I’m here, wondering if I’m going to have to ‘obliviate’ you before I leave this office.”

Harry could tell that he was dead serious. He just laughed. “I’d like to see you try.” He raised his hands as Fabian started to draw his wand. “Not seriously.” he chuckled. “Thank you for telling me your story. If you’re truly interested in the job, I think you’re the man I’m looking for.

But I warn you, it's a long term commitment. A minimum of 6 years, possibly longer, or perhaps a positions change after those 6 years. The other thing is that I plan on having your brother-in-law, Arthur Weasley, and your nephew, Bill Weasley work for me, and they would be answering to you on a daily basis. If either of those are going to be a problem, you're free to walk out right now...with a wizards oath from me never to reveal your identity."

Fabian looked skeptical. "They won't know who I am?"

Harry shook his head. "As far as anyone else will know, you're Richard Lawson, muggleborn wizard."

Fabian sighed, and rubbed his forehead. "Then yes, I'm still interested. But I'm also curious to your story."

Harry sighed. "It's not pleasant." he said, solemnly

"And MINE was?!"

"Forgive me, that's not what I meant. Can I trust you, Mr. Prewett?"

"I trusted you." he bit out

"You did." Harry relented. "But then you threatened to Obliviate me, and I'll give you the same warning. I will tell you my story, but after you hear it, and if you decide you don't want to have any part of this, I will understand, but I will obliviate you, and believe me, you'll understand why after you hear everything."

Fabian looked surprised, but responded, "Alright, I'm listening."

Harry took a deep breath, then started. "What do you know about time travel, Mr. Prewett?"

Fabian raised an eyebrow. "I've read a bit on the topic. I had a teacher at Hogwarts who was fascinated by the subject. My senior project for him was over it."

"Ancient Runes Professor Curtis Braxton, right?"

Fabian nodded. "How'd you know? Never mind, I don't care. Please continue."

Harry chuckled. "Anyway, Do you remember a spell called 'Commuto Historia'?"

Fabian paled.

"I can see you do. Do you remember what it does?"

"It...it's supposed to send your mind or memories back in time to a younger version of yourself, but it's incredibly Dark Magic!"

Harry nodded. "It is dark, but only because you have to kill yourself to do it."

"ONLY?!"

Harry shook his head solemnly. "Sometimes there's no point in going on."

"There's always something to live for." Fabian argued stubbornly.

Harry gave him a look. "I'm glad you feel that way."

"But you don't?"

Harry sighed. "I didn't, but now I have everything to live for."

"Are you saying you're actually from the future?"

"My mind is, from about 20 years from now, in the year 2011."

"And how old were you?"

"31." Harry watched as Fabian did the mental math and a stunned expression crossed his face.

"You mean you're 11-Years-Old?!" His voice was full of shock

“Only in body.” Harry replied simply

“I’d be working for a KID?!”

“Only in body.” he said again. “And no one would know that. When I do need to make a public appearance, I’ll use this disguise and alias.”

“So who are you?”

Harry sighed, and pulled out his wand, and a small vial. He took a swig from the vial, canceling out the effects of the aging potion, then removed the charms from his hair and eyes. He was now back in his 11-year-old body, with dazzling green eyes, and messy black hair. He pushed his bangs aside to reveal his scar.

Fabian let out a gasp. “Harry Potter?” he whispered.

Harry nodded. “Now are you beginning to see?”

Fabian thought for a moment, then paled. “The Dark Lord? He comes back?” he whispered

Harry nodded. “In my timeline, less then 4 years from today.”

If possible, Fabian’s face went even whiter.

“4 years? But he’s been gone for over 10!”

Harry nodded. “But he’s not dead. It took me 15 years to stop him last time. That won’t be the case again!”

“So shouldn’t you be focusing on that, instead of running a business?”

“Believe me, I am. But I believe this business is a necessity. It is a ‘for profit’ business, but it’s also designed to help people. I want it to become a place people can turn to when the Ministry or society lets them down; a safe house, if you will.”

“You said the war took 15 years? How bad was it?”

Harry wore a grim look. “In a word, ‘BAD’, but perhaps it’d just be easier just to show you.” He reached into his pocket, and pulled out a small box. He muttered an enlarging charm. The box grew, and he pulled out a jeweled cup.

“A Pensieve?”

Harry just nodded.

At this point, Griphook hadn’t said anything, but now he spoke up. “Would you like me to leave, Mr. Potter?”

Harry had almost forgotten there was anyone else in the room. “Oh, Griphook, I’m sorry. No, no, you’re welcome to stay. I hope this’ll explain a few things to you, as well.” Harry lifted his wand, and pulled several memories from his mind and placed them in the pensieve. “I trust you know how this works.”

Fabian gave him a questioning look. “You’re not joining us?”

Harry gave him a solemn look. “Would you willingly watch your brother die again?”

Fabian’s face went grim and nodded. Harry put the pensieve on the table, and the two men dove in. 45 minutes later, they emerged, both with a variety of expressions on their faces.

Griphook didn’t say anything, but the horrified look on it spoke volumes. Fabian, on the other hand, didn’t just look horrified, but also incredibly angry, pure rage, if Harry had to describe it.

His voice came out cold and harsh. “Was that MY FAMILY?!” he almost shouted

Harry gravely nodded.

“And...they all died?” his voice was starting to break

“Yes. Ron, your nephew, was my best mate from 1st year. The relatives that I lived with hated me, so I’d spend my Summer holidays at the Burrow. Molly and Arthur took me in, and treated me just like a son. They became ‘Order’ members in my 4th year when Voldemort came back, as did Bill and Charlie. Eventually all of their kids did as they came of age. I did at the end of my 6th year.”

“The ‘Order’, as you probably know, becomes a family within itself. I fell in love with their youngest, your niece, Ginny. We eventually married. I was 20, she was 19. We wanted to wait ‘till the war was over, but...there was just no end in sight. Two years later, despite our precautions, Ginny wound up pregnant. The war was raging. There was no place safe. I begged her to go into hiding, but she refused. 7 months later, she gives birth to our twins. Only then does she take them and go into hiding. I’m able to protect them for nearly 3 years, before everything blew up. There was...a...breach in security. The place where Gi...they were staying was attacked. All three of them...” Now Harry’s eyes were filling with tears. “Ginny...Ginny died in my arms, but not before she made me promise not to stop ‘till I defeated that bastard!”

“Well, I did! I fulfilled that promise, but in the end...it wasn’t worth it. The price was too high. Everyone was dead. England was in ruins, not to mention the greater part of the rest of Europe. The population was severely depleted, at last count, more than a million children were left orphans, and even more dead, including my own!” his voice was hard and bitter

“So you see, I had nothing to lose by performing that spell. Even if it didn’t work, I would still be dead, which was exactly what I wanted. Either way, I’d see them again.” His voice filled with defeat and anger. He paused to let the two men digest his words. Fabian spoke first.

“I’ll do whatever it takes to make sure they’re safe, to keep that future from happening!”

“As will I.” Griphook added

Harry gave a slight bow to each of them. “Thank you.” Then he turned back to Fabian.

“So does that mean you want the job?”

Fabian nodded.

“Will you take an oath, never to reveal my identity or anything I’ve shown you today, without my express permission?”

“Yes.”

“Good. Then let’s work on the paperwork.”

For the next few hours, the three of them worked on the paperwork for the building, Fabian’s contract, and financial matters. Harry also worked with Griphook, and arranged to contract an office interior design team to come in and set the building up with desks, chairs, computers, phones, ect. He also arranged to take care of the magical side of things. The Floo Network hookups, an apparation permit for the building, and making sure it cleared all of ministry regulations. This was going to be a Magical Company, but it was also going to appear as a Muggle company, so it would have to meet a double set of standards. Harry didn’t want to give the Ministry or anyone else any reason to shut him down.

They ended the meeting with the ink drying on Fabian’s contract, several meetings arranged to interview some of the other people on Harry’s list, and a set of oaths. Fabian took the oath Harry had specified, and Harry and Griphook took an oath never to reveal Fabian’s identity without his express permission. They left with a promise to meet next Tuesday to conduct interviews.

Before exiting the office, Harry re-donned his disguise, and transfigured a cloak, pulled the hood up, cast an obstruction charm on his face, and made his way into Knockturn Alley.

Finally finished this chapter! The next chapter may take a bit to get up, 'cause it's a bit longer, but I'll get it up as quick as possible, but now I need your help.

I know that it's odd using italics for speech. I don't know why I do it, it just seemed like a good way to distinguish between my details and dialogue, but I want your opinion. If you want me to discontinue using it, please let me know, and I will. If you like it or don't care either way, please let me know that, also. I'll decide whether or not this is the last chapter that uses it, based on your opinion.

Thanks for the help. Hope you're enjoying it so far.

Midnight Star 25

Preparations

The next few days were spent brewing the array of potions he always carried with him...along with a few extra. It took longer than usual, due to creating multiple batches. Once in Hogwarts, it would be much harder, without arousing suspicion.

So far, his collection included Calming Draught, Pepper-Up Potion, Dreamless Sleep, Aging Potion and its antidote, Veritaserum, Head-Ache Relieving Potion, Skele-grow, along with an array of other medical potions, Polyjuice, and most importantly, a supply of Horcrux destroying potion, which he commonly referred to as the 'the soul killer'. The scary part of that is that he 'commonly referred'.

Also, during this time, he met with the company that would furnish the building, as well as handle the electricity and water supply. Harry and the main designer went through the building. He described how he wanted it. Professional, yet with a homey feel to it.

The top level would serve as an Apparation point. The level below would be divided into two large offices, which would serve as Harry and Fabians personal floor. The three floors below that would be the Potion Labs. The seven floors below that were to be set up as offices. The third and fourth floor would serve as storage space and distribution centers for the safe houses. The second floor would function as an employee cafeteria, and Healer's station.

When Harry and the designer came to the first floor, Harry told her that he wanted it designed as a Welcome Center and sitting area. The designer told him that there would be extra space, and suggested that he might want to put a daycare center for his working parents. Harry thought it was a great idea, and immediately approved it.

He got to thinking about who he might be able to get to run it, and immediately wondered if Molly might be interested. He remembered how depressed she had become, after Ginny had started school. She admitted later, that she felt that she hadn't contributed to her family, once there were, no longer, any children in her constant care. He would have to make a note of that to Griphook as well as Fabian.

Having his brother-in-law, or even nephew under him was one thing, but having his sister under him was something entirely different.

On Monday, he received an owl from Griphook detailing the appointments set up for Tuesday. They included Arthur Weasley, Bill Weasley, Remus Lupin, Henri Estaba, a muggleborn witch by the name of Alicia Ryder, who he wanted as Director for the Children's Safe House Division, a half blood wizard by the name of David McKnight whom Fabian had suggested for the Head of Security, and about a dozen younger individuals from Harry's list.

Tuesday was going to be an extremely long day. Harry went to bed early, but had trouble sleeping. In less than 12-hours, he would be seeing people he hadn't seen in years, friends and family who had fought by his side, whom he'd seen die in battle, and whom he'd grieved over.

He sighed heavily. He had a second chance. He wasn't gonna blow it.

Interviews

Harry arose early that next morning, donned his alias, and apparated to Diagon Alley. It was only about seven in the morning, so he was truly surprised to a majority of the Weasley clan as he entered the Leaky Cauldron. They were her, safe and sound.

Emotion washed over him, as he used everything he had to keep himself from running up to them, and throwing his arms around them. But he had to remember that he was in his alias, and they didn't even know Harry Potter yet. Plus, he could just image the looks on Percy's, Fred's, Georges, and Ron's faces if he did that. He chuckled at the thought. They would definitely classify him as mental.

Nevertheless, he didn't think it would hurt to introduce himself under his alias. He slowly approached the family.

"Mr. Weasley?" he asked slowly

Arthur turned towards him. "Yes?"

"Arthur Weasley?"

"That's right. Do I know you?"

"No, but I've seen your file. I believe we have an appointment later today."

"Mr. Myers?"

Harry nodded. "Jacob Myers. It's a pleasure to meet you." Harry stuck out his hand. Arthur shook it.

"You too, Mr. Myers, although I'm still a bit confused as to what I'm meeting you for."

Harry nodded. "I understand. It's a bit hard to describe. I think it'll become clearer once you see the business plans, but I apologize. I seem to be interrupting your family time."

At that moment, Molly came up next to him. "Dear, we're ready to go. Oh, hello." She said, noticing Harry

"Honey, this is Mr. Myers. Mr. Myers, my wife Molly." Harry shook her hand. "He's the man I'll be meeting with today."

"It's very nice to meet you, Mrs. Weasley."

"Likewise, Mr. Myers."

"I must say that Arthur is a very lucky man. We're very anxious to have him on board with our organization."

The two of them looked surprised, but also a tiny bit pleased.

"Exactly what type of organization is this, Mr. Myers?" asked Molly

Harry smiled. "I think I'll let your husband explain after our meeting today. I'm afraid I wouldn't be able to do it justice. And may I assume that these are your children?"

Molly nodded. "Yes, we're here to get school supplies. Our youngest son will be starting this year."

"Hogwarts, then? I see the crest on the robes. Excellent school."

"Yes, yes it is. Both Molly and I attended as well."

"Well, forgive me, but I must bid you good day. I'll see you at 11?"

Arthur nodded. "Mrs. Weasley, It was a pleasure to meet you. I hope this won't be our last. You have a beautiful family." And with that, he turned, and quickly walked out.

As he entered the Alley, he leaned heavily against the cool stone, tears threatening his eyes. He had just spotted a familiar red ponytail walking their way. He wasn't ready to see her again, not without breaking down. He closed his eyes, and focused on his Occlumency. This was not the time to lose it. He took a deep breath, before adjusting his robes, and making his way to Gringotts.

Harry met with Griphook, and then began the interviews. The first couple of interviews were for some of the junior positions. The morning went well, and by 10:30, he had successfully convinced a dozen freshly graduated Hogwarts students to join his staff. Their contracts were signed, and they would start in 2 ½ weeks. That is, if he could get everything done by then. The design team promised to have everything complete within a week, with just a little financial encouragement. The time was ticking before Harry had to be back at school. Harry seriously considered just not showing up, but that wouldn't be a very effective way of keeping a low profile.

His next appointment was one he'd been looking forward to. He steeled himself, then entered the room. There he was. His uncle. The man who'd been as good as a father to him. His robes were worn, and his face showed the after effects of the recent full moon.

"Mr. Lupin." Remus stood up. "I'm Jacob Myers." he said, shaking the man's hand. "Please come in." They entered the office. "This is Richard Lawson." Remus shook his hand

"It's nice to meet both of you."

"Please, take a seat." Indicating a small table. They all sat, and Harry pulled out a stack of papers.

"Now, did Griphook explain the position?"

"Only in summary. I admit, I'm a bit confused."

Harry nodded. "I apologize for that. I can't say it's a...traditional job, but it is something my boss and I feel the magical world needs."

"And who is your boss?" questioned Remus.

Harry smiled. "I'm afraid he wishes to remain anonymous for the time being. In this company, he's merely the financial backer. I'll be in charge of this operation, although my job requires a great deal of travel on my part, so Mr. Lawson, here will run the daily operations. Now, this is the idea for the company.

Harry and Fabian spent the next 20 minutes showing Remus the details of the company. Harry could tell that Remus was impressed, and his suspicions were confirmed.

"This is truly insightful. I've never even considered many of these problems."

Harry nodded. "That's the point. The Ministry of Magic doesn't take care of anything that doesn't affect them directly. People and the Magical Creatures Communities need a place they can turn when the Ministry fails them."

"You don't seem very fond of the Ministry." Stated Remus, amused.

"Are you?" questioned Harry "They haven't exactly made your life easy."

Remus paled. "You...know?"

Harry gave him an encouraging smile. "Mr. Lupin, you wouldn't be here if I didn't."

"And you're still making this offer to me?" his voice held skepticism and distrust.

"That's one reason I do want you. I want you as Head of Magical Creature Relations. You've been in their positions. I'm sorry to say that you know what they've been through, the pain and fear they've experienced. I don't believe a regular witch or wizard could effectively handle this position. Many of the individuals we would be dealing with would feel like no one could understand them or their situation. I'm hoping that you and your staff will be able to change that opinion, and create a bond of trust that's desperately needed."

"Staff?" questioned Remus

"You didn't think you'd have to do this yourself, did you?" Harry chuckled "Yes, staff. As I said, you'll be Head of your department, only answering to Mr. Lawson and myself. Right now, I plan on

having your department divided into 3 divisions. The first group will consist of the Veela, Centaur, Goblin, and Leprechaun Communities. The second group will be...more of a challenge. It'll consist of the Dragon, Trolls, and Giant Communities. The final group will consist of the Werewolf and Vampire Communities. This'll be a unique group, since neither condition is natural. They were both started by a curse centuries ago. Now, your department will be working very closely with the Research Department, and more specifically the potions division. One method towards establishing trust is by providing for their livelihood; making their interactions with society...easier. For example, a veela can't normally go out without causing a lot of, usually, unwanted attention. The anti-sensuating potion is a simple enough solution to prevent this, but it's normally, only available to the wealthy, due to the difficulty in its creation."

"Well, if it's so difficult, how would we provide it?"

"We have certain...resources available, but I noticed that you said 'we'. Does that mean you're interested?"

"I...think so. The final group you mentioned, what...?"

"Of course. With the Vampire and Werewolf Communities, the main potions we'll supply are the Vampire Serum and the Wolfsbane, respectively. Although we're still searching for cures for both of those, and there are other potions that they use on a regular basis, and we're going to try and open up the market on some of those. Oh, and that's another thing. Should you choose to accept this position, part of your benefits package will include the necessary supply of wolfsbane each month, although it may be a bit different then what you're used to. Our labs have made improvements to the publicly known formula. So far, we've found that it enhances your energy level, reduces the exhaustion you feel before and after the full moon, it reduces the high fevers before the moon, as well as, further, minimizing the pain of the transformation. We've also made improvements on the Vampire Serum, but it's a bit more difficult, due to the fact that you're trying to mimic or substitute such a vital part of an individual. Very few recognize the...importance...of the soul, but I apologize. I'm getting off topic. Does that answer your question?"

Remus nodded, slightly.

“So, are you still interested? You’re free to walk out that door at any time.”

Remus was processing all this. It seemed...almost, well...to ideal...to good to be true, in a sense. His life had taught him, from an early age, just how cruel the world could be, especially to ones seen as different or dangerous.

“Are you serious about all this?”

Harry chuckled. “Very serious, Mr. Lupin. Are you interested?”

Remus hesitated, but nodded.

“Wonderful! Now, I’m going to let Mr. Lawson go over your contract and salary with you, and if you have any concerns, let me know. I’ll be back momentarily.”

He exited the office, and entered another one.

“Mr. Weasley, so sorry to keep you waiting.”

“Mr. Myers, quite alright. I’m afraid I’m a bit early.”

“Not at all, please come in.” After they were both seated, Harry began. “I apologize for the cryptic description earlier. Let me explain exactly why you’re here.”

For the next 20 minutes, Harry went through the major points of the company, and, more specifically, the details of the Muggle Relations Department. Not surprisingly, Mr. Weasley had lots of questions, and even through in some ideas and issues Harry hadn’t considered. Harry knew that he had made the right choice.

“So, what do you think?”

Arthur looked up from the papers. “I think it’s a wonderful idea, I’m just wondering...is it plausible? It’s true that the ministry doesn’t

address a lot of these needs. The Ministry, as a whole, I'm afraid, is very set in their ways..."

"Yes, and I want this company to start to change that attitude. Many of these issues, probably, should be handled by the government, or, at least, the people should expect their government to handle them, but, as you said, that's often not the case. And, yes, I do believe it's plausible. I don't believe it'll be easy, by any stretch, but I do believe it's necessary. Any chance you're interested?"

Arthur nodded. "Very much so. I agree that there's a need, and it sounds like a wonderful way to help those children."

Harry was pleased. That's exactly what he wanted to hear, especially before he brought up the next subject.

"Good, good. But I know this isn't a decision to make lightly. You have a family to consider, as well as a current job with the Ministry. For those reasons, I'd like to go ahead and discuss salary and benefits."

He pulled out a contract, and slipped it in front of Arthur. "This will be the starting salary." pointing to a figure. Mr. Weasley's mouth dropped, but Harry continued, a smile playing on his lips. "With a guaranteed yearly increase, due to inflation, and should you choose to accept, I'd need you to start in just over 2 weeks, so there would be a 5,000 galleon signing bonus for any problems or complications that might arise in changing jobs so quickly."

Mr. Weasley was speechless, and Harry was having a hard time keeping a grin off his face. He took a deep breath, and focused on his occlumency.

"Will any of that be a problem, the salary or the time restraints?"

"Uh...uh...no. Are you serious?"

Harry laughed. "That seems to be the question of the day. Yes, Mr. Weasley, I am very serious. My boss will spare no expense in seeing that this business is a true success, but as I said, this is going to be a

lot of work. On the other side of that, you will be provided with all the financial and business resources, business contacts, and so on that you'll need to, hopefully, be successful in this position. Do you think you're up for that?"

"I...I think so."

Harry smiled. "Great. Now, I'd like you to meet some of the people you'll be working with." They stood up, and Harry led the way back into the first office.

"Mr. Lupin, I'd like you to meet Arthur Weasley. He'll be Head of Muggle Relations. Arthur, this Remus Lupin. He'll be Head of Magical Creatures." The two men exchanged greetings, and shook hands before sitting down. "I wanted you to meet, before everything was finalized, because your departments will be working together, and I need to know something, Mr. Weasley. Mr. Lupin, here, is a werewolf. Will that be an issue?"

The other men in the room were taken aback by Harry's bluntness, but Harry ignored their looks. He only focused on Mr. Weasley. A look of surprise crossed his face, before reverting back to the kind, fatherly, understanding nature.

"Not at all." He replied, genuinely. "I assure you, I have no prejudice."

"Excellent." said Harry. "And, I assure you, Mr. Lupin, I will not hire anyone who does. Speaking of which, I'd like you to meet one other member of our team. He won't be in either of your departments, but I thought, Mr. Weasley, especially, might like to know that he's on board."

Harry pushed a button on the desk. "Gala, could you send him in please?"

"Yes, Mr. Myers." (A/N: I know the idea of an intercom system may seem a bit muggle, but I couldn't think of another way to do it. Just think of it as a magical intercom. No wires needed.)

A moment later, another red head came through the door.

“Dad?”

Mr. Weasley turned around. “Bill? What are you doing here?”

“I could ask you the same question.”

Harry chuckled. “Nice to see you again, Bill. Please come join us. Bill is my new Director of the Wards and Curse Breaking Division of the Security Department. Bill, your father is the new Head of the Muggle Relations Department, and this is Mr. Remus Lupin, and he’s the new Head of Magical Creatures.”

Bill greeted Remus before sitting down.

“Oh, and Arthur, this is Richard Lawson. He’ll be in charge of the daily operations of the business. As far as chain of command goes, you’ll only have to answer to him, and myself, although, as the others already know, I will be traveling a great deal, but I will be available if needed. Now, any questions?”

‘Jacob’ and ‘Richard’ spent the next few minutes fielding questions. One question was, ‘So, where would we be working?’

“I’m currently having the new office building furnished and decorated. If you’d like a tour, I could arrange one for tomorrow. It’s in Downtown London, but I just got the Floo Network hooked up, and my apparation permit for the building should come through in a few days. If you’d like to meet in the Leaky Cauldron, say around noon, we can floo from there. Mr. Weasley, if you’d like to bring your wife, I’m sure she’d like to see where you’ll be working.”

Arthur nodded. “Thank you, that sounds great.”

“Bill, Remus, that time okay?” They both nodded. “Good. Mr. Lawson, is everything complete with Mr. Lupin?”

Fabian nodded. “Okay, Mr. Lupin, do you have any additional questions?”

Remus looked at him. "Who are you?"

Harry put on a surprised look. "What do you mean, Mr. Lupin?"

"No one does this." Honestly, Arthur was thinking the same thing.

Harry laughed. "Then I guess I'm no one. Honestly, Mr. Lupin, that's society talking. Not everyone's so caught up in themselves to ignore the needs of others. There's a real need in our society, and if we're going to leave a better world for our children, we can't just sit back, and hope for things to change." Harry's voice was starting to rise, so he took a deep breath before continuing.

"I'm sorry, I don't mean to preach. Now, if you need anything else, or have any other questions, please don't hesitate to send me or Mr. Lawson an owl." He shook hand with both of them as they stood up to leave, as did Fabian, only holding onto his nephew's hand a second longer.

"Welcome aboard. I know that both of you will be wonderful additions to this company."

After they were gone, Harry turned his attention back to Arthur. "Well, let's get through this paperwork so you can go meet your family." After everything was official, they shook hands, and Harry bid him good day.

Right before he left, Harry called out, "Oh, I almost forgot. That signing bonus will be transferred into your account within the next 20 minutes. See you tomorrow." He added, before closing the door, leaving a surprised Arthur Weasley on the other side.

Arthur's POV

Arthur waited around the bank for 30 minutes, before requesting a trip to his vault. Sure enough, there it was. More money than he'd ever seen at one time. Money had never been that important to him or his wife, but with so many children, especially in school, it certainly helped. He couldn't believe all this was happening. He had, essentially, just quit his job, to go and work for a completely unknown

company. Yet, it was very close to a dream job, with a salary to match. He would now be able to properly provide for his family, the way he had always wanted to. He couldn't wait to tell Molly, although he was a bit afraid of how she might react. He filled his money sack, before making his way back to the surface.

His family was waiting for him at FloreanFortescue's Ice-Cream Parlor. The kids were talking to some of their friends. As he approached his wife, he picked her up, and spun her around, before giving her a big kiss on the cheek.

Molly looked surprised. "What was that for? Did your meeting go well?"

Arthur's face held a huge grin. "Oh, Molly, it went great, better then great." He was having a hard time finding the right words. "This is..." he shook his head. "the answer to our prayers." His eyes were shining with excitement.

"What? What happened?"

"Come sit down. I'll tell you everything." By the time Arthur was finished, Molly's mouth was hanging open as well.

"This is all legitimate?!"

Arthur nodded. "Everything seems to be straightforward. They want us to tour the facilities tomorrow, and Mr. Myers invited you along. Do you want to go?"

Molly shook her head. "Of course, but the kids?"

"Percy'll be there, and we won't be gone long."

She nodded. "Is this real?"

Arthur smiled. "I've asked that too. It's real." He leaned in, and placed a gentle kiss on her lips, which she returned, before they were interrupted by 'Muum, Dad, don't do that in public!' They both burst out laughing.

Back at the Bank

Harry continued on with the interviews. He had successfully convinced Henri Estaba and David McKnight to take the two remaining Head positions. Estaba was a hard sale, but Harry knew he would be. He also knew how his old (uh, future?) friend operated, and what he cared about. David McKnight turned out to be a slightly younger, more handsome, and much less paranoid version of Moody, although he took security very seriously, and had the experience Harry was looking for. Alicia Ryder said that she was extremely interested, but that she would have to check on a few things before she could accept. She promised to have her answer within 48 hours. Harry also succeeded in filling most of the financial positions with young goblins Griphook had recommended.

Overall, the day had been had been a huge success. He had all 5 of his Heads. He had two of his three directors for the Magical Creatures Department. A 24-year-old man and werewolf for the Werewolf/Vampire Division by the name of Bailey Johnson. He had been bitten about 2 years ago when he had been on a Ministry assignment. He had been an 'Auror-in-training', but after he'd been bitten, the Ministry had deemed him 'too dangerous' to keep on staff. The Ministry's prejudice infuriated Harry to no end, and he had seen, first hand, just how that prejudice had backfired, and resulted in the worst possible outcome.

For the Centaur/Veela/Leprechaun/Goblin Division, he had hired a 23-year-old witch, named Carolina Robinson, who was part Veela, and turned out to be a distant cousin to Fleur Delacour. He still hadn't found someone for the Giant's/Dragons/Trolls Division. He considered Hagrid for the job. It would have been right up his alley, if not for two minor details. One, he was completely loyal to Dumbledore, and two, he had a habit of accidentally shooting off his mouth. Harry would hate to think what one of his contracts would do to poor Hagrid. No, Harry would have to find someone else; although he thought he might get him to do some freelance stuff.

In the Muggles Department, he was pretty sure he had Ryder for the Safe-House Division. She was a Muggleborn witch with had gone

onto University after graduating Hogwarts, and received her Social Workers license. She had worked as a Social Worker in the Muggle world for over 12 years. She had a great deal of experience with children, as well as recognizing magical children who came through the system. Also, to her benefit, she had several close friends who were also a part of Social Services, some caseworkers, others in higher positions. Some of them were also witches and wizards, and others were trusted muggle friends. Harry considered her a real asset to the organization.

For the Director of the Magical Studies School, he had found a 42-year-old Half-blood witch by the name of Shelia Gherhart, who had, not only, been an Ancient Runes Professor at Beauxatons for several years, but due to a family situation several years ago, had gone back to her muggle roots, and become an Elementary School teacher. That covered the two divisions of the Muggle Department.

For the Research Department, the Potions Division had been the easiest to place. Estaba turned out to currently have an apprentice, a 21-year-old wizard, by the name of Alex Jenkins. Estaba had told Harry, in no uncertain terms, that he didn't get him, without his apprentice. Harry had done a quick background check on the boy, then quickly approved the 'request'. Jenkins was a pureblood, and had graduated from Durmstrang, but didn't seem to have any ties with the Death Eaters, or any sympathies towards Voldemort's way of thinking, plus he was willing to study under Estaba, who was a half-blood, which Harry thought was a mark in his favor, so Jenkins was now the Director of the Potions Division.

For the Spells/Curse Division, he had chosen a 31-year-old witch, by the name of Grace Wylie. She was an Italian born witch, who had moved to England at the age of 16, when her father had been transferred by his job. She had actually finished her last year of school at Hogwarts. She was a muggleborn, and had made top marks in school, and was very optimistic. She reminded Harry, a great deal of Hermione. He figured they'd hit it off, if they got together. Grace was a genius when it came to Ancient Runes, Charms, and Transfiguration. Harry suspected that she was an unregistered animagus, but Harry kept that suspicion to himself. If she was, then they defiantly had something in common.

For Security, he had Bill Weasley for the Wards and Curse Breaking Division. One thing Bill had requested was to be allowed to still free-lance for Gringotts, which was a request Harry had no problem in granting. It would give Bill additional experience, and help him grow into a stronger curse-breaker.

He had secured a 36-year-old, muggleborn wizard, by the name of Max Sanders, who had trained as an Auror for several years, before becoming fed-up with Ministry politics, and joining the Muggle Police, where he had been a successful cop for 7 years, before getting promoted to Sergeant 4 years ago. He also had a great number of contacts Harry believed would be useful. He was now the new Director of Everyday Security. In other words, he handled the division that would guard the building and those within it. They would also be used as security at the safe-houses, and, when needed, protecting the children and those who would collect them, in case of violence or abuse, as unfortunately, was often the case.

The third and final branch of Security was something equivalent to a small Auror division, although Harry referred to it as the Dark Arts Defense Division. He had recruited a retired pureblood Auror, by the name of Xander Zambini. He turned out to be the great-uncle to Blaise Zambini, but proved to Harry that he didn't hold to all the pureblood nonsense, nor had he ever been a Death Eater, despite his family ties. For now, Harry trusted him. He had signed the contract, so if he did go back on his word...well, if any of his employees did, Harry would know about it.

Griphook had the financial division well in hand. Harry had hired a handful of staff for each division, including everything from potions students to childhood majors. They included a mixture of goblins, werewolves, veelas, and two who, obviously, had at least some giant blood in them, although they were nowhere near the size of Hagrid. There were still a few slots to fill, but he still had a number of interviews over the next few days.

“So, is there anything else I need to take care of?”

“Oh, nothing that can't wait 'till tomorrow.”

“Good, then I need to discuss something with you and Fabian.”

The Goblin and the wizard looked up, and indicated that Harry had their undivided attention.

“Les anges volent haut au-dessus des ombres.”

Both men raised an eyebrow, and responded together. “Le ombre trionferanno se gli angeli cadono.”

“Die Engel können von innen nur fallen.”

“Slechts door één van hun.”

“Con la traición del grado más alto.”

Harry turned over his right wrist to reveal a small tattoo. A crest of a distinguished black griffin, with piercing red eyes, and snow white angel wings, were surrounded by a banner with the words ‘Angeli per vita’. At that, both Fabian and Griphook copied Harry’s example and revealed identical tattoos.

“La vie et la fidélité appartiennent à la confrérie.”

“Het leven en de loyaliteit behoren tot het broederschap.”

Harry walked over to the two men, and grasped Fabians outstretched arm, connecting the two tattoos. Harry closed his eyes, as, what seemed like, a jolt of electricity surged through him, as the marks recognized each other, forming a bond with their bearers. Harry then repeated the process with Griphook.

“Brother.” Fabian breathed. “The Midnight Angels welcome you back.”

Here’s the conversation translated:

French: “Les anges volent haut au-dessus des ombres.” means ‘The angels fly high above the shadows.’-spoken by Harry

Italian: “Le ombre trionferanno se gli angeli cadono” means ‘The shadows will triumph if the angels fall.’-spoken by Fabian and Griphook

German: “Die Engel können von innen nur fallen.” means ‘The angels can only fall from within.’-spoken by Harry

Dutch: “Slechts door één van hun.” means ‘Only by one of their own.’-spoken by Fabian and Griphook

Spanish: “Con la traición del grado más alto.” means ‘Through betrayal of the highest degree.’-spoken by Harry

‘Angeli per vita’ is Italian, and it translates into Angels for life

French: “La vie et la fidélité appartiennent à la confrérie.” means ‘Life and loyalty belong to the brotherhood.’-spoken by Harry

Dutch: “Het leven en de loyaliteit behoren tot het broederschap.” also means ‘Life and loyalty belong to the brotherhood.’-spoken by Fabian and Griphook

I am so sorry it took me so long to get this chapter up. Once I got to typing, I found a lot of ways to improve what I had already written. The next chapter should be up much sooner. I’m aiming for Thursday, Friday at the latest. I hope you like this last part. I’ll be explaining more about the mysterious ‘Midnight Angels’ in the next few chapters. Thanks for reading.

Midnight Star 25

A Tour

“So how come we didn’t recognize you before now?”

“For the same reason I didn’t recognize Fabian, at first.”

“But only other members can see the mark.”

“That’s right, but there’s a second part to that. It concerns the protection spells surrounding the mark. You have to know that the other person is a member in order to see the mark, and that stems from the rule that every single member of the society has to be present in order to initiate a new member. Each member connects their marks, and has that person’s name engraved in their mind.”

“But you haven’t ‘technically’ become a member yet. How can you have the mark?”

“I’ve asked myself the same question. This is the best guess I can come up with. When I sent my mind back, my magic and soul came along for the ride. That’s...uh...why I’ve retained all my powers. My future magical core melded with my current one, as did my soul. The mark is connected directly to the soul and the magical core. So...technically...I’m still a member, but I only know the names of the members from my time, not this one. That’s how I knew Griphook was one.”

“But you didn’t know I was one? How old were you when you became a member?”

Harry hesitated. “21.” He finally answered.

Fabian paled. “You mean I die within the next 10 years?”

Harry sighed. “That would have had to have been the case. You know the oaths. Once you’re a member, it’s for life, but let me say this. By that point in the war, Voldemort was in full force. There had been dozens of attacks on magical and muggle London, Diagon Alley, and Gringotts. I learned later that the Angels had been the other main pocket of resistance, aside from the ‘Order’, and many of the

members had died in the counter attacks they mounted. From what I've observed...I don't think you would have been satisfied to just sit back and watch when so many people were dying."

Fabian sat back, but nodded in agreement. "So how did you figure out I was one?"

"Luck, in part. You said you 'freelanced for Gringotts', but you didn't say how, you were a spy for the 'Order', plus you're a pureblood, yet you don't hold to all the 'pureblood superiority' crap. Your magic is above average, but you're discrete about it. You're smart, you've got strong mental shields, and you see the...value...in the dark arts, rather than just immediately condemning them. All classic traits of an Angel."

Fabian raised an eyebrow. "And you figured all that out, just through observation?"

Harry shrugged. "What can I say? It's a gift...or just years of experience, whatever you want to call it."

"But most members are either goblins or hold prominent positions within the community. I fit neither description."

"Most do, but not all. Plus, Griphook knew you too well, and he wasn't surprised when I revealed your true identity the day we first met. He was surprised, just not for the reason I initially thought."

"So what do we do now? You are a member, yet you're not?"

"I am a member, I just need to make it official in this time line. I need to meet with the entire society, and renew my vows in front of them, just so there will be no doubt as to my loyalty."

Griphook nodded. "Could there be repercussions? I don't think anyone's ever taken the vows twice, and as you said, it's connected our very souls, as well as our magic."

"I realize that, but it's a chance I'm willing to take. Do you think you can set up the ceremony before I go back to school?"

“Griphook sighed. “It’s gonna be hard pressed, but I think we can do it.”

“How many current members are there?”

“Uh, about 150. How many were there when you joined?”

“About 100 when I first joined. We were nearly wiped out by the end of the war, as was the ‘Order’. As I said, no one was immune.”

“Who was your leader in your time?”

“I was, for the last 4 years of the war, but before that, it was Jerosa from the House of Lorek. Unless I’m mistaken, I believe he’s the current leader.”

Griphook wore a stunned expression. “He is, but there’s never been a human leader! Not to mention someone that young!”

“You didn’t see how bad it was, plus, I was the current leader of the Order. By that point, the whole world knew that damn prophecy, so they knew that there would eventually be a showdown between me and Tom. But trust me, when I say, I am not after either title again. I have no desire to lead, unless absolutely necessary.”

“Yet you seem like a natural leader.”

Harry rolled his eyes. “Don’t remind me. It’s a role I was forced into, yet never wanted. Oh, that reminds me. I didn’t realize this when I hired him, and tell me if I’m wrong, but...Xander Zambini...he’s one of us, isn’t he?”

Fabian looked embarrassed. “Yeah, he is.”

“He’s a plant.”

“In part. Sorry.” He said, guiltily.

Harry shook his head. "No need to apologize. I would've done the same thing in your position. Is there anyone else I should know about?"

"No, we just wanted...with as many communities as you were planning to deal with..."

Harry stopped him. "I understand." He stated amusement in his voice. "It was a smart move." He added in all seriousness.

"Uh, guys, I hate to break this up, but...if you two don't get going, you're going to be late for your meeting."

Harry looked at his watch. "Ooh, thanks Griphook. Fabian are you sure you want..." Harry shut up when he saw the look Fabian was giving to him. "Right. Shall we go?"

Fabian nodded, as the two of them made their way to the Leaky Cauldron.

Even though Fabian masked his emotions, Harry recognized the signs. He knew Fabian was nervous about spending time with his family, particularly Molly. She was his only living sibling, and if he missed her half as much as she missed him, well....he just hoped them spending time together would do Fabian some good. He knew the questions that were haunting Fabian, the what-if scenarios, and the fear of rejection. The same feelings afflicted him.

"Arthur, Molly." Harry greeted "So glad you could make it."

The couple stood up as the two approached.

"Thank you." replied Arthur. "Happy to be here."

"Molly, I'd like you to meet Richard Lawson. He'll be Arthur's boss, and the face of the company."

Molly stuck out her hand. "Nice to meet you, Mr. Lawson."

He bent down and gently placed a small kiss on her hand. "Arthur is a very lucky man, Mrs. Weasley."

Molly blushed slightly, but managed a thank you. At that moment, another Weasley walked in.

"Ah, Bill. Glad you could come."

Molly looked surprised. "Bill, what are you doing here?"

Bill looked at his father. "You didn't tell her?"

Arthur shook his head. "I figured you'd want to."

Bill grinned. "I'll be working for the same company dad is. I'm the new Director of the Wards and Curse Breaking Division, but I'll still be doing some free lancing for Gringotts."

Molly gave him a big smile and hug. "Congratulations. I'm very proud of you."

Harry could tell he was little embarrassed at being hugged by his mother in front of his new bosses, but he took it in stride. Harry actually envied him. He wished he could be embarrassed by his mother that way. At that moment, the last member of their party came through the door.

"Remus, welcome. Molly, this is Remus Lupin. Remus, this is Molly Weasley, Arthur's wife."

Remus nodded. "My pleasure, Mrs. Weasley."

"Nice to meet you, Mr. Lupin."

"Well, shall we go?"

Harry walked up to the fireplace, and threw in a pinch of Floo powder, and called out, 'Unity Foundation, Level 1', and stepped through. Minutes later, they were all through.

“Well, this is it. We’re currently in the heart of Downtown London. This first floor is our welcome center. Please pardon the mess. I’m afraid the decorators won’t be through for a few more days. Back here...” indicating the back half of the 1st floor. “...will be our daycare center for our working parents with small children. Actually, I already know of 11 children from the age of Infant to 4 who will be attending, and a few other parents who are considering it.”

Molly spoke up. “How many children can this facility hold?”

Harry smiled. “About 50 at the moment, although there is room for expansion if necessary. The problem is, I can’t even open it ‘till I find a Director. I have the workers, but one of the requirements I have to meet is a Full-time Director. Basically, I just need someone with childcare experience and who has the time on their hands. But, I’m sorry, I shouldn’t be babbling about my problems. Let’s go to the next floor.”

As they got on the elevator, which Mr. Weasley was fascinated by, Harry internally smirked. He could already see the wheels turning in Molly’s head.

He showed them the cafeteria and the Healer’s station on the 2nd Floor, before moving to the distribution centers on the 3rd and 4th Floors. Harry had already started moving in the necessary supplies for each division, as well as for the children and the safe-houses.

The 5th and 6th and 7th Floors would be the Security Division. There were a few rooms that looked like shooting ranges, but were actually for spell accuracy. There were also a number of dueling rooms and interrogation rooms. In addition, there were several holding cells, which were hidden from view. Harry decided not to reveal these, considering Molly was present.

The 8th and 9th Floors were for the Muggle Relations Department. Along with the typical office layout of desks, filing cabinets, ect, there would also be several rooms set up as playrooms for child counseling. That would also be under the safe house division. Harry then showed them where Arthur’s office would be. As they entered, he saw Arthur’s eyes light up, and Molly’s eyes were slightly brimming with

tears. It was a huge corner office, with large picture windows, and a clear view of Downtown London. A large desk next to the window, and lavishly decorated with matching chairs, a couch, and so on.

“I’m afraid it’s not finished, but you can add your personal touch once you move in. There’s also an adjacent section through those doors for your secretary, and I’ve had a magical intercom system, and a muggle telephone system installed throughout the whole building. I’m also having muggle equipment brought in, such as computers, faxes, and so on, since many of our dealings will be with the muggle world, although magic is still encouraged. There are benefits in both methods. And since many of the employees are from purely magical backgrounds, I’ve hired a team to come in and teach those who need it to properly use this equipment.”

The 10th and 11th Floors were the Magical Creature Relations Department. Harry showed them Remus’ office. Remus had a similar reaction to Mr. Weasley, he was just better at hiding it, but Harry knew how to read his old friend. The office was just as lavish as Arthur’s. Harry wanted them to have the best, and to truly feel appreciated.

“Here, I have a special addition to each of these offices that I think you’ll find interesting.” He moved over to one of these walls, drew his wand, tapped a few times, and ran his hand over a certain spot, then muttered another spell. Suddenly, a door slid open, to reveal a small hidden room.

“These are safety rooms, specifically designed in case of emergency. Once inside, they’ll seal themselves against anyone with malicious intent towards the room’s occupant. They’ll also provide whatever the occupant may need, just by thinking it. Food, medicine, even a floo network to escape, if necessary, although you can’t apparate out of them.”

He resealed the room, before turning back to the group.

“That’s very imaginative, Mr. Myers.” interjected Bill. “Where’d you get the idea from?”

Harry smirked. "Oh, just an idea I picked up at school." He said cryptically. "Anyway, right now, the spells on it are only keyed into my signature, but once everyone's moved in, they'll be keyed in the office's personal owner."

Bill had a question. "Are you saying no one can break it?"

Harry raised an eyebrow. "Well...it is...possible, but highly improbable." Harry smirked. "Care to give it a shot?"

Bill mentally kicked himself for setting himself up like that, but he knew there was no way out of it now. He slowly moved to the wall. He drew his wand, and spent several minutes concentrating on it, before performing several silent spells, and several complex patterns against the wall. Suddenly, the panel started to open. It looked like he had succeeded, before it abruptly shut again, and sent a shock that knocked Bill off his feet.

Harry chuckled, as Bill got up. "Nice attempt, Mr. Weasley. I'm impressed. You actually almost had it, but you missed two important aspects. Do you know what they are?"

Bill moved back over to the wall, and ran his wand over it a couple of times. Finally, he turned to Harry, a slightly guilty look on his face.

"The first is that I didn't take into account the fact that it was only keyed into your signature. Even if I'd gotten it open, I wouldn't have been able to cross the threshold, without completely disabling the wards, and my guess to that, even with a dozen of the top curse breakers, would probably take at least a week."

The group looked stunned at that proclamation, but Harry looked pleased. "Very good. Now, what's the second?"

Bill frowned. "I'm...not sure." He admitted

Harry smiled. "That's alright. It's okay to admit you don't know something. It's how we learn. Check the layers again."

Bill looked frustrated, but did. After another few minutes, and a few wand waves, his eyes got big. “Whoa!” was all he got out.

The group looked to Harry for an explanation.

Harry grinned. “I can see you figured it out.”

“It’s ingenious, but incredibly rare! I nearly missed it.”

“Yes, it’s designed to be subtle.”

At that, Fabian interjected. “What in heaven’s name are you two talking about?!” he asked, annoyed at being ignored.

Harry laughed. “Bill?”

“A Wandless Magic Ward.” Bill was still in awe.

The group gasped. Remus spoke first. “Do you mean that you can...”

Harry grinned. “Don’t go spreading it around, but yeah. Wandless magic really isn’t that hard, it just takes practice. Certain magical creatures such as goblins, centaurs, and veelas are incredibly adept at it. We can learn a lot from them, if we just choose to take the time.”

“So, what’s the difference?” asked Molly “I mean, isn’t magic, magic?”

“Bill, you want to field this one?”

Bill nodded. “Wandless magic, aside from not being a common talent among the average witch or wizard, is different from magic performed with a wand by it’s signature as well as it’s strength. Wand magic contains a combination of the witches or wizards own magical signature, along with the signature from the core of the wand, and is generally considered stronger, due to the use of a secondary magical core. Wandless magic only carries the signature of the witches or wizards magical core, and is said to be weaker, due to the amount of power an individual has to put out to perform the magic, although I have heard arguments, refuting that claim.”

“Excellent analysis, Mr. Weasley. I can see I didn’t make a mistake in hiring you.” He praised

“Yes, the signatures are very different. Wandless magic carries a much purer signature, although I only agree with you, in part, about the strengths. It’s true that you use more magical energy when performing wandless magic. You use less when you use a wand, because part of the force of the spell is being drawn from your wand. When you perform a spell, a tiny piece of your magical energy is drawn from your core. It’s then filtered and enhanced through the core of your wand, before being released through the end of it. With wandless magic, you are drawing more from your magical core, and it is filtered directly through your hands, although it’s generally not weaker than a spell performed by a wand. Plus, anyone who commonly practices wandless magic, has more than likely, practiced it for years, and has not only built up their core, in order to accommodate the extra energy they’d need, but understands the concept of just how to adjust the power level of the spell, depending on the circumstances, and just how powerful they desire the spell to be. Frankly, it can make all the difference in the world, when it’s used properly in spells or potions. But I’m sorry. I’m sure that’s a lot more than you ever wanted to know. It’s all just boring theory. Let’s move up to the potion’s labs.”

They finished the tour with the Potion’s Labs, and the Apparation Floor, before moving to the floo.

“So, any questions?” Harry asked

Surprisingly, Remus spoke up. “What kind of spells or wards do you have on the Floo?”

“You felt them, didn’t you? When we came through?”

Remus nodded.

“Well, aside from the standard security spells and wards, there are a few specific ones. Just like the security rooms, there’s one that keeps anyone out with hostile intent. There’s one designed to specifically recognize muggle weapons, such as guns, bombs, and other

explosives, and either neutralize them or melt them, rendering them harmless. There's also a powerful ward keeping anyone out that bears the Dark Mark. The same wards and spells cover the entire building, and the Apparation Floor."

Harry glanced at the group. All, but Fabian had paled when he mentioned the Dark Mark.

"Do you really think that's necessary?" questioned Molly, worriedly

Harry gave her a sad smile. "I'm afraid it is, Molly. I've put together one of the most diverse, and perhaps, one of the most controversial staffs within the Wizarding Community. I'm positive, that once we hit the public eye, we will be met with opposition. Many people won't see the benefits in the work I hope this company can accomplish, nor will they agree with my selection of staff members. I already have a number of werewolves, veelas, and goblins on staff. I also don't care whether you're pureblood, half-blood, or muggleborn, and I certainly don't hold to the pureblood superiority belief system, nor the idea that all magical creatures are instantly dangerous, which is a grave mistake that the Ministry, in general, holds to."

"Under the safe house division, we'll be dealing with magical children who have been abused or abandoned, as well as squibs, if necessary. Aside from that, one of the more public aspects of the company will be a small school, where we'll hopefully be teaching muggleborn or muggle-raised children about the magical world, before they go off to Hogwarts. Pureblood students are not generally, magically stronger on average, but they have had the advantage of growing up in the magical world, and they already understand society's standards and expectations. The school is designed to help start them in that understanding."

"As I said, I have little doubt, that once certain parties get wind of just what we're trying to do here, the company will come under certain scrutiny. Lucius Malfoy, for starters, but these wards will not allow him any type of access, which will no doubt infuriate him, but I'm prepared to deal with him or any other problems that may arise."

The group had gone quiet at Harry's obvious accusation of Lucius Malfoy as a Death Eater. Fabian broke the tension.

"It's almost one. I don't know about the rest of you, but I need to get back to work."

This made everyone remember their responsibilities. The group thanked Harry and Fabian for the tour, before flooing to their respective places. Harry and Fabian flooed back to Gringotts.

"Are you all right, Fabian?"

Fabian's face was a blank mask. "Yeah." He answered evenly.

Harry shook his head. "You forget who you're talking to. You can't mask that longing in your eyes."

Fabian sighed, and relaxed his mask. "I've missed her so much. You know, so near...yet, so far."

"I know. I also know how desperately she's missed you. She puts up a picture of you and your brother on the Christmas tree every year, right above that ornament the two of you gave her when she was 10."

"You don't mean that one that spins, and spells out her nickname? That was a gag gift."

Harry chuckled. "That's the one. I'd say she sees it as anything but a joke."

Fabian shook his head. "I thought she'd thrown that thing out years ago."

"Fabian, as much as I believe I can end this threat without the breakout of war, I'm afraid it may be inevitable in one way or another, and if that happens, I'm afraid your family will become a target, whether you're part of it or not. They're purebloods, Arthur's worked in the Ministry for years, plus he had a fascination with muggles, they're a purely Light family, they don't support the pureblood agenda, which automatically makes them blood traitors in numerous eyes and

circles. I know Lucius Malfoy already has a beef with Arthur. My point is, they're already targets. I showed you part of what happened the first time around. You might just want to think about revealing your identity, and maybe getting to know your family. People are the only things that make this life worth living." With that final word, he walked away, leaving Fabian alone with his thoughts.

Molly and Ceremony

The next week kept Harry, Fabian, and Griphook constantly on their toes, finishing all the furnishings, wards, and supplies for the building. Harry had just about filled all of the staff positions, with just a few exceptions. He smiled, when he received an owl from Molly Weasley requesting a meeting the next day. He agreed to meet her at the Leaky Cauldron at one. Now, he found himself sipping a Butterbeer, waiting for her arrival. A few minutes later, she gracefully stepped out of the Floo.

“Mr. Myers, thank you for meeting me.”

Harry pulled out her chair, before sitting down.

“Not at all, Mrs. Weasley. Would you like to order something first?” signaling a waitress.

“Just a cup of tea, please.” The waitress nodded, and went to fill the order.

“Now, Mrs. Weasley, what can I help you with?”

“Um” she looked a bit nervous. “I was...wondering...if you’d filled the Daycare Directors Position?”

Harry internally smirked, and outwardly smiled. “No, actually I haven’t. Are you interested in the position?”

At that moment, the waitress brought her tea. She stirred it nervously. “I mean, I don’t know if I’m qualified...”

“Well, tell me a little about yourself.”

For the next few minutes, she told him all the facts he already knew about her. Graduated Hogwarts with high marks in her NEWTS, married young due to the war, Mother of 7, stay-at-home mom.

“My youngest son will be starting Hogwarts this year, then it’ll just be my daughter at home, and she’ll be starting Hogwarts next year.”

“And you miss having children to constantly care for.” He stated knowingly.

She looked surprised. “Yes.” She relented. “I...suppose so.”

“Have you spoken with your husband about this?” She nodded. “And he’d be okay with you working in the same building?” She nodded again.

“Well then, I suppose the only other issue would be with your daughter.”

“Well, she has a friend who will start Hogwarts with her next year. I thought about working out an arrangement with her father.”

Harry nodded. “Does she like kids, your daughter?”

Molly looked surprised. “Um, yeah, I guess she does.”

“Well, if your first plan was to fall through, you could always just...bring her to work with you.”

A startled expression crossed her face. “You mean...”

Harry grinned. “Mrs. Weasley, anyone who can raise 7 children, 6 of them boys, is more than qualified in my book. If you want the job, it’s all yours.”

Molly was speechless.

“If you’ve got the time, we can go fill out the paperwork right now.”

She was still speechless, but got out, “Um, sure.”

Harry laughed. He dropped a few coins on the table, before leading Molly back to Gringotts. An hour later, all of the paperwork was taken care of. She also received a generous bonus, and a nice salary. She would start in a week and a half. Just days before school started. Harry knew that he was cutting it close, but, so far, everything

seemed to be going smoothly. Fabian turned out to be a great problem-shooter, but Harry should have expected that with Molly Weasley as his sister.

He welcomed her aboard, and told her that there'd be an all employee meeting in a few days, and he'd be owling her and Arthur with those details.

After she left, Harry went straight to Fabian's office.

"Well, your sister is now officially on board. Are you sure you're okay with this?"

Fabian shifted. "Yeah, I am. I've...been thinking about what you've said. Maybe...by Christmas..." He looked at Harry questionably

Harry smiled. "I think it's a great idea. I know she couldn't ask for a better Christmas present. I'll help you in any way I can."

"Thanks. So, are you ready for tonight?"

Harry sighed. "As ready as I'll ever be. I can't believe Griphook convinced them to convene so quickly."

"Do you know what you're going to say?"

"Yeah."

"Nervous?"

Harry shrugged. "A bit, but I learned years ago that constant fear and worry are just a waste of time. You prepare for the worst-case scenario, then deal with the reality of the situation."

Later that Evening

--location-unknown, but somewhere in the mountains of England's North Country

A huge group is gathered in a carved out room inside one of the mountains. The room was huge, and could comfortably fit over a thousand people. The stone walls had been smoothed over, and a long balcony-like section of marble had been erected as a stage area, rising several feet off the ground. Chairs were currently set up in front of the stage area.

A loud crackle echoed through the room. All conversation ceased, and the group silently sat down. Each individual wore a dark cloak, and a hood, along with an obstruction charm on their face, hiding their features. The only distinction that could be noticed among the group was in the height of the individuals. A handful of figures towered above the majority of the group. The distinction between the humans and goblins was evident, but no one noticed or cared. Everyone's attention was currently focused on the stage.

The only individual in the room who had his hood lowered stood up, and approached a low podium.

"Anges pour un" (translation: French: Angels for one)-leader

"Angeli per vita" (translation: Italian: Angels for life)-collective group

"Welcome, welcome one and all. I would like to thank you all responding to this call so quickly. We are here tonight to initiate a new member."

At that, a quiet chattering broke out among the group. This wasn't right. The Head Goblin let out a low crackle once again, and brought back silence.

"My friends, I realize that this does not follow protocol, but this is far from a typical case. When I was approached by this individual, I was incredibly skeptical, but two of our own vouched for him, and he has shown me, what I believe, to be irrefutable proof to back up his claims."

"I pride myself on having seen and done much in my 107 years of life. There is little I come across that I have never seen before or experienced, but the young man that approached me has shown me

both. I ask that you hear him out fully, before passing judgment. He has an extraordinary tale, one which you will almost certainly disbelieve at first, but, hopefully, come to see the truth in. This young man, is, in fact, already a member of this society, but that is where his tale comes in. I remind you, that under your vows, anything that is said in these meetings is strictly confidential, and can only be discussed with another member. That vow is especially imperative for today's meeting. Now, I turn it over to our newest member."

The Goblin slowly stepped back, bowed to a small hooded figure, then sat back down. The crowd was silent, as the figure stood up, and approached the podium. In his hand, he carried a jeweled cup, which he placed gently on the podium. The figure did not take down his hood, or the obstruction charm, before beginning.

"My friends" he began slowly "I thank you for your indulgence for these most unusual events. Before I begin, I want to assure you that everything I'm about to tell you and show you tonight is true. For that, I am going to take an oath. I will not use my name, solely because you need to understand part of my story, before you hear my identity. He held up his wand, and spoke 'I so solemnly swear on my life and magic that everything I tell you tonight to be the complete and honest truth.' A powerful burst of light nearly blinded the group, before quickly subsiding. The assembled instantly recognized that this was no ordinary being, but then again, neither were most of them. It was kind of an...unwritten requirement for membership into this group.

"Thank you. Let me begin by addressing the statement that our distinguished leader, Jerosa, made that no doubt has you baffled. How can I be a member, when there was no vote or initiation? Simply put, I was not initiated as a member until the year 2001."

A quiet muttering broke out among the group, but quickly stilled again.

"Many of you are undoubtedly ready to throw me into St. Mungos for making such a claim, but let me explain. You see, I'm from the future. You all know that time travel is possible with a time turner, but that's not what I'm claiming. I'm from 20 years into the future, or at least my mind is. For those of you who know something about Ancient Runes, or at least managed to stay awake in that class..." light laughter

echoed against the high ceilings "...I used a spell and ritual known as Commuto Historia."

Harry could almost feel the room grow a bit colder, but no one interrupted.

"I realize the nature of the spell, but let me prove to you that there was truly nothing left to live for." Harry drew his wand, and quietly waved it over the pensieve. "You see, my friends, the Dark Lord known as Lord Voldemort is far from dead, and in my time line, he attempted to come back in full strength in less then four years from today. But don't take my word for it...let me show you."

With a flick of his wrist, he pulled up his memory from the night in his 4th year when Voldemort had used his blood to resurrect himself, displaying it to the whole group. The scene started after Wormtail had cut off his hand, and Tom was emerging from the cauldron. It went on to show Tom calling his Death Eaters and them responding.

"Voldemort is currently nothing more then a wandering spirit, but in 4 years, he did manage to regain a body. After that, the second war broke out...and it was devastating. My friends, it took me over 15 years to stop him last time. And during that time, he and his followers devastated everything." He flicked his wand and pulled up another memory. "Diagon Alley in the year 1997...the year 2003...2006...and 2010." Harry heard the gasps as the scenes got worse. The buildings decimated, the body count growing higher and higher, and the streets running red with blood. He pulled up another scene. "Magical and Muggle London after a series of attacks between the years of 1998 and 2006. By that point, most people had fled the city, or had been killed in an attack." He flicked his wand in quick succession. "Hampstead...Greenwich...York...Durham...Nottingham...Norwich...Bristol...Windsor...and so many others." He receded the last town. He composed himself before bringing up the next scene. "This...was one of the first major attacks that took place in the year 1997. It was...during a Hogsmeade weekend." He pulled up a horrific scene. Students and townspeople were running for their lives, as the ones in black robes and masks decimated everything in their path. "Over 65 people were killed in that attack, twe...twenty-three of those Hogwarts students and 16 children under the age of 10. That wasn't

the last attack on the town, nor did the Death Eaters stop there.” He pulled up a final scene. “This is Hogwarts after...more then a dozen attacks in the year 2009. It had already been shut down two years before that. More then 200 students died in those attacks.” His voice was beginning to break, but he knew he had to stay in control.

“Ma...Many of you may have figured out my current age by the years I stated. For those of you who haven’t, my current body is...11-years-old.” There were a few gasps, but Harry could tell that most had already figured it out. “But I assure you that my mind is fully adult, and I am a member.” He turned his wrist over, and revealed the Griffin. “I bear the mark, and I have given my vows, but, if you will accept me, I am here to take the oaths again, in your presence. But before that, you need to know my identity, and perhaps it will help you understand why I went to such extremes, and just why I played such a big part in this war.”

He slowly lowered his hood, and removed the obstruction charm. His emerald eyes were flashing with fervor, as he pushed back his bangs revealing his scar. Several gasps could be heard.

“Some of you may recognize me, but all of you know my name. My name is Harry James Potter, known to the Wizarding World as the Boy-Who-Lived. I will also confide in you that I am masquerading as a man by the name of Jacob Myers.” He cast a quick glamour charm on himself. “This is my adult identity. I am currently in the process in opening a company, I believe will help create a better future for our world, but that’s not the most important thing here tonight.”

“It’s true that Voldemort’s body was destroyed ten years ago, but he didn’t die, as I’ve already shown. I am the ONLYone who can destroy him, and I fully accept that responsibility. I stopped him once, and I will do it again! I won’t allow that future to come to pass, but I do ask for your help to continue fulfilling the main reason this society was created; to maintain the balance.”

He paused before continuing. “I’ve stated my case. I now turn it back over to you.” He stepped back, and allowed Jerosa to take the stand again.

“You’ve seen the evidence. I have no doubt that you have many questions you’d like answered, but that’s not what I want you to focus on for the moment. I want you to ask yourself if you have any doubts in Mr. Potter’s sincerity. He took the oath to only speak the truth, and he is willing to take the oaths again. If anyone has any type of reservation with initiating Mr. Potter, now is your time to speak.”

Jerosa quite speaking, and waited. The entire room stayed silent. After 5 minutes, Jerosa spoke again.

“Then we shall proceed to the ceremony.” Harry moved to the left of Jerosa, and raised his right hand, holding his wand.

“Mr. Potter, repeat after me.” Harry nodded. “I, Harry James Potter...”

The repetition of the vows passed without incident, as did the connecting with each members mark. After the ceremony, a number of the members left, but most opted to stay behind to talk with their newest member. Some of them had still been alive in his time, while others were brand new faces. He answered many of their questions, but also knew that some things, especially things that could be changed, didn’t need to be said. He spoke with Xander Zabini, who was, surprisingly, understanding.

Overall, Harry considered the night a complete success. The group accepted him, even though he still appeared a child, and many had already approached with offers to help in any way they could. Harry thanked them, and said that he would be in touch. He knew what needed to be done; he just needed to get his plans laid out.

Thanks for being so patient. I hope you liked this chapter. I got one review that suggested I make Molly a little more aggressive, but I had already written the scene like it is, and I didn’t feel like I should change it for several reasons.

‘Jacob Myers’ is currently her husband’s new boss, and demanding something from your husband’s new boss probably isn’t the best way to begin a relationship.

Plus, Molly’s been a stay at home mom for the last 20+ years, and anyone who’s been out of the work force that long has definite feelings of inadequacy, and a fear that they don’t have the necessary skills or tools to survive in the business world. (trust me, I know. My mom was a stay at home mom for 10 years, before she went back into the work force, and she had strong feelings of inadequacy, even though she held a Bachelors and a Masters degree)

Anyway, hope you liked it.

Midnight Star 25

The Midnight Angels-A History

During the years between 1527 and 1532, a Goblin rebellion sprung up in the heart of England. It was lead by an exceptionally powerful and Dark Goblin, deeming himself Rokin the Formidable. Rokin believed that Goblins were superior to all beings, witches and wizards in particular. He believed that the goblin community was being horribly repressed by the current Wizarding government. He and his followers began a rebellion against said government that escalated into a full scale war by the end of the year 1528. Many goblin families agreed with him, but anyone who didn't was viewed as a threat.

One goblin, in particular went by the name of Balik from the House of Guise, one of the most prominent and respected goblin families within England. Balik was married, and had two young daughters. He found himself caught up in a war, where he didn't fully agree with either side. He didn't agree with all of the regulations the humans had placed on the goblin community or many of the other magical creature communities, for that matter. But nor did he agree with Rokin's tactics for dealing with this oppression. He had been raised in a household where he was taught to embrace both the Light and the Dark Arts, alike. It wasn't the magic itself that was evil, but it's application by an individual. For this reason, the Guise Family was normally seen as a gray family, and typically remained neutral in political disputes. Balik, himself, believed that these disputes should be handled politically and in a dignified manner.

The current leader of the wizarding community was a man by the name of Faron Lamar. His reign was one of an iron fist. He had little tolerance for anyone or anything considered Dark or dangerous, or even those who aligned themselves with the Dark Arts. Not unlike Rokin, he was power-hungry, and he didn't care who he had to step on to achieve his goals. When this rebellion first broke out, Faron saw this as his chance to make his point clear on his opinions toward these 'Dark' forces.

As the war raged on, it became nearly impossible to stay neutral. Both sides were pushing the people, particularly the prominent families to join them. Balik was no exception to this, but for a time, he

managed to stay true to his credence in neutrality. Unfortunately, that was to be short lived.

On December 30, 1528, as people were celebrating the New Year, Rokin and his followers launched an attack on a prominent Magical community named Ascon, with a mixture of wizards and witches, and many magical creatures, located in the Black Country of England, outside the town of Himley. Balik and his family had been members of this community for several generations. The attack came swift and deadly as the clock tolled midnight. Balik's family home was one of the residences hit hardest, due to his neutral stance. Faron, having received word of the attack, decided to send his forces out in full strength. He decided that this was the time to crush the resistance, no matter what the cost, and decided not to warn the residents of the upcoming attack, literally making them unsuspecting targets. He ultimately made the town a war zone, and these family's homes and front yard's the battleground. Once again, Balik's home was no exception.

Outside, spells and curses were being thrown around without any type of reservation. More than one stray fire spell caught lawns and homes on fire. Before Balik even realized it, he awoke to a house full of smoke. His wife was gone from his side. At that moment, his youngest daughter, Elayna, burst in the room in tears. He gathered his daughter close, and apparated directly to the woods behind his house. What he saw, once outside, horrified him to the core. His home was half engulfed in flames, as were several of his neighbors. He instructed Elayna to stay in the woods, out of harms way. Then he tried to apparate back in to look for his wife and other daughter...but he couldn't. Some type of ward was stopping him. He then started running towards the house, but was met with a roadblock there as well. He learned later, that Faron's forces had put up a series of powerful wards and shields to prevent anyone from getting in or out. The only reason Balik had succeeded was the magic surrounding his ancestral home, and its design to protect the Guise family. But, once outside the house, the wards took effect. Balik couldn't get anywhere near the house or the fighting. The only thing he could do was cling to his daughter, and pray that his wife and child had gotten out safely.

It was several hours later, when the fighting ceased and the wards were brought down. Balik searched frantically among his friends and neighbors for any sign of his wife, Minuit, but with no luck. He then returned to the remains of his half burnt house. It was only there, that he found the bodies of both his wife and his oldest daughter. His wife's body was covered in burn marks, and it appeared that she had been searching for their daughter, Taylar, when the flames had surrounded her. Taylar's body, who had only been 7, was found in one of the burnt out hall ways. It looked like she had lost her sense of direction between the smoke and the flames. The hospital later confirmed that she had died from smoke inhalation. As he wept over his wife's broken body, he vowed to do everything in his power to bring this war to an end.

A few days later, he buried his wife and daughter, then took his daughter, Elayna, and disappeared. He went underground, and started working to fulfill the promise he had made to his wife. He began, by recruiting others who were in similar positions as himself. Opposed to both sides, yet still wanted to see this war come to an end. He found many supporters, most holding prominent positions within the community, such as himself. Therefore, this underground society was born, with Balik as the leader and founder.

As the society gained members and strength, Balik decided to give them an identity, a goal, and a purpose. Aside from wanting this war to come to an end, the members agreed on a larger agenda. They despised Faron's tactics nearly as much as Rokin's. They believed that it was their responsibility to keep the balance of Light and Dark, Good and Evil in check. All members of this society had to meet a strict set of standards, and one of those was that they had to accept the Dark Arts right along with the Light ones, yet the member, in question, could not be 'evil', per say, or power hungry. Aspiration for personal gain was acceptable, but the members had to care about others as well. They had to hold to the principle that each being, whether they be goblin, wizard, or other creature was to be judged on an individual basis, by his or her own actions, not whether society considered them light or dark. A member had to retain a certain amount of knowledge as well as wisdom. Since most were members of the upper class of society, they were highly educated, well read, and well rounded. A member had to see the world as a place created

for all beings, and that all intelligent creatures should be allowed basic rights, and no one group should be allowed to repress or dominate another, although they did not dismiss or disregard the issues of class. They were not foolish enough to believe that they could bring about world peace or create a 'utopia', they simply believed in balance.

While Balik mostly recruited fellow goblins to join his folds, he did see the benefit in human support. Very slowly, he approached a select few prominent witches and wizards. As his forces began to grow, Balik felt that the group needed an identity. He wanted to create a name that hid their true work, but also accurately described them. He thought back to his beloved wife and daughter. Then it hit him. His wife had been French, and not only had a name with a French meaning, but had insisted that both of their daughters have the same. Elayna's name stemmed from French origins meaning shining light. And she truly was. In his dark world, she was the only thing that made him keep going, and see the light at the end of the tunnel, at the end of this war. His wife's name was Minuit, which meant midnight in French. He used to call her his midnight star. (A/N: sorry, I just had to throw that in.) His eldest daughter's name, Taylar, was also of French origin, meaning angel. He decided to name the group in honor of his wife and daughter. Therefore, Les Anges de Minuit was born, simply known as The Midnight Angels.

The Angels weren't 'warriors', per say, and Balik didn't see himself as a 'general' leading troops into battle, at least not in the traditional sense. After seeing what his open stand on neutrality had cost him, he believed the best course of action was to operate in the shadows and under the radar. Many of the members used their positions to deal with the political aspects of the war, but others were trained for a more delicate arena. Simply put, they were trained as master assassins. While Balik disagreed with murder in any fashion, he also realized that there would always be individuals that were too dangerous to be left alive. Individuals who had made their choices, and there was no turning back. Nothing would stop them from attempting to reach their goals, and a prison would only be a temporary solution. Great Power of any kind will always have followers, whether it be Light or Dark.

Aside from the main qualities Balik looked for in a potential Angel, there were also a number of obscure ones that were less then obvious. For starters, the individual had to speak at least a minimum of two languages, and once a member, had to learn a minimum of seven; including English, Spanish, French, Italian, German, Dutch, and Latin. Many of the safety features he required of the group involved certain phrases to be said in a particular language at a certain time, or in recognition of one another. Another requirement was that the member had to be proficient in Occulmentry or had to learn it once a member. He preferred them to be masters in Legilemetry as well, but he didn't insist upon it.

The Angels were finally able to bring the war to an end by the Summer of 1532. Rokin finally managed to take down Faron, then the Angels managed to take down Rokin and the rest of his followers. The Angels managed to replace Faron with one of their own, and begin the process of rebuilding.

Over the next 50 years, Balik continued to lead the Angels in their main goal of maintaining the balance of Power between the Light and the Dark. In the year of 1586, Balik was struck down during a rescue mission. He died a hero, and in his place, his daughter, Elayna, stepped up, and continued leading the group, and working towards his goal of a better and safer world.

I know this took me a long time to post, but I will have the next chapter up much sooner.

Thanks for reading.

Midnight Star 25

A Personal Life

The days following the meeting passed in a blur. It felt good to be reconnected with his fellow Angels, many of whom he had called 'friend' for years, but he had little time to dwell on that. It was now less than a week before the business officially opened its doors. Everything was ready. All of the paperwork was done, all the permits were in place, and all of the staff was hired. The building was completely furnished from the potion labs to the daycare center. He complied with every muggle and magical requirement (that wasn't easy), many of his contacts were in place and ready to help locate magical children in the muggle world (although it helped that he had 'tapped' into the Hogwarts Registry of Future Students--that was a long story and wasn't quite legal), and he also had contacts ready to help with the different magical creatures communities. The Potions labs had everything needed to start brewing, and all of the security was in place, from the actual guards to all wards and security spells on the building, and the amazing part was that he pulled it off in less than a month.

Now there was just one thing missing in Harry's life. His Family. His first stop? Remus Lupin. The man who only knew him as his boss, Jacob Myers, not his 'nephew', Harry Potter. Harry was about to have to prove just how good of an actor he was. Remus Lupin was not the only family member he wanted. He desperately wanted his godfather out of jail, but it would still be tricky to pull it off. He was afraid he might have to involve Dumbledore if his first plan failed. But for now, one step at a time. First thing, meet with Mooney. Second, get Padfoot out of jail. Boy, it was hard being a 30-year-old in an 11-year-old body.

Remus' POV

Remus couldn't believe how much his life had changed in a mere two weeks time. He had gone from living paycheck to paycheck, and constantly moving from place to place as he got work, being feared by most who would hire him, to holding a very high position in a company that knew what he was, and still wanted him; a very good salary, and with a bonus, with which, he was able to purchase decent robes, and rent a modest flat in Magical London.

He actually had a job he was looking forward to starting, and would be starting in less than a week. Yes, things were definitely looking up. Then why did he feel like there was something missing?

A rap on the window interrupted his thoughts. He opened it, and let the owl in. He removed the letter, thinking it was a letter from work, and immediately unrolled it. What he saw made his stop cold. It read...

Dear 'well I'm not sure what to call you',

Would it be okay if I called you Uncle Remus, although I like the sound of Uncle Mooney better. That's what my dad referred to you as in his journals. I feel like I already know you, although I know that you haven't seen me since I was a baby. I got my Hogwarts letter this year, and rejoined the wizarding world. I'll be boarding the train on September 1st, but if you have the time, I'd love to meet with you before then. I'll be in Diagon Alley on the 24th. If you want to meet, I'll be in the Leaky Cauldron around 2 p.m. Thank you for your time, and I hope to see you soon.

Your Nephew,

Harry Potter

Remus was gobsmacked as he reread the letter. James' son was contacting him! He had tried so many times to see Harry over the years, but each time, Dumbledore had stopped him; told him to wait until Harry came of age. Well, Harry was of age, and he had contacted him first. The 24th was the day before he started work, but he wouldn't miss that appointment for anything in the world.

Remus

On the 24th, Remus arrived at the Leaky Cauldron at 1:30. He was extremely nervous, although he wasn't entirely sure why. He looked around at the patrons, but none of them were an 11-year-old boy. He decided to get something to eat, and hopefully steady his nerves. Several minutes passed. All of a sudden, he felt a tap on the shoulder.

“Uncle Mooney?” came a child’s voice

Remus turned around, slightly startled. Looking back at him was an 11-year-old version of his best friend. Several emotions shot through him.

“Harry?” The boy nodded, then with a child-like enthusiasm, gave Remus a child’s hug by throwing his arms around his waist. Remus was taken aback, but immediately returned the hug. After a moment, they released the other.

Harry took the initiative. He put on a child’s look of slight embarrassment.

“Sorry.” he said innocently. “I just feel like I already know you.”

Remus wasn’t sure how to respond.

“Um, that’s okay. You know...you look just like your dad, except your eyes, they’re...”

“My mothers.” Harry finished. “I’ve seen pictures. She was beautiful.”

Remus nodded. “Yes, she was.” There was a moment of uncomfortable silence, before Harry spoke up.

“I read a lot of the stuff my parents left me. Letters, journals, even some memories in a pensieve. I loved all the pranks you guys pulled in school.”

A ghost of a smile crossed Remus’ face.

“Yeah, your dad was an expert in that particular field.”

Harry smiled. “Yeah, he and Uncle Padfoot were always getting into trouble.” Harry knew this would cause a reaction, and he was right. At the name of Padfoot, Remus’ face fell.

“Harry...” he said slowly “I think there’s something you should know...Padfoot...Sirius...he...” Remus was stumbling over the words. Harry decided to put him out of his misery.

“Remus, it’s okay. I know what Sirius is accused of.”

Remus looked startled. “Then...why...”

Harry reached into a bag he’d been carrying. He produced a single envelope and placed it in front of Remus.

“My parents left several letters in case...well, this one’s for you.”

Remus slowly picked up the letter. It had one word written on it. ‘Mooney’.

(A/N: I’m afraid some of you may question the validity of the letter, but let me assure you that these letters were fully written and sealed by Lily and James. Harry would have only gained access to them when he turned 17, in his timeline, because the vaults were originally under his guardian’s jurisdiction. Lily and James left them there, because they had named Sirius as guardian, and he would have allowed Harry access to the vaults and the letters. Anyway, on with the story.)

“Harry...”

“Remus, please...just read the letter. I think it’ll explain a lot.”

Remus let out a heavy sigh. “Okay.” he said softly.

He picked up the letter and broke the magical seal. Harry sat back, as Remus started reading. He knew this would be hard, but it had to be done, and the sooner the better, as far as Harry was concerned. Harry could tell when Remus got to the important part. A look of horror crossed his face, while going ashen white. As he finished reading the letter, he slowly sat it back down on the table.

“He...he didn’t do it.” Harry could see the relief that consumed his face.

Harry smiled. "No, he didn't. He was completely innocent."

Tears were starting to well up in Remus' eyes.

"You know, I don't think he killed all those muggles either."

Remus looked up, confusion on his face. "What...do you mean?" he asked slowly.

(Acting abilities, 11-years-old, kid NOT adult)

"Well...I've read all the reports on it, and it doesn't make sense. Peter was the spy and the secret keeper, not Sirius, but Sirius knew Peter was the secret keeper, at least according to mum and dad's letters. From everything I've read about Sirius in Dad's journals, he seemed...well...a bit...hotheaded." he said slowly, looking at Remus for confirmation.

A faint smile played on Remus' lips, as he nodded. "Sirius always did act before thinking things through."

Harry nodded. "I thought so." He said innocently

This made Remus chuckle.

"Anyway..." Harry continued "...If Sirius did figure out Peter had betrayed you guys ...well...I mean, if I was in Sirius' position...I might go after Peter too without thinking about the consequences." Harry could see the wheels turning in Remus' head, as he put all the pieces together.

"Peter blew up the street...then...framed Sirius."

Harry nodded. "I think so. I also don't think he's dead, like they claim. I think he faked it. I know he was a rat animagus..." this made Remus look up in surprise, but Harry went on "...and I think he decided to cut off his finger, make it look like he was dead, and that Sirius did it, transform into a rat, then escape into the sewers."

“So simple.” Remus breathed. Then a realization hit him. “Harry...” he said slowly “...if you know about Peter being an animagus, then...does that mean...”

Harry just smiled. “I know about Dad and Sirius too. I also know they were illegal, and why. Don’t worry, I won’t tell anyone. Plus, I think it’s cool to have an uncle who’s a...” his voice dropped “werewolf.” he whispered.

Remus just shook his head. “Boy, kid...you beat all. Just like your dad.”

Harry grinned. “Thanks.”

Remus just laughed.

“Remus?”

Remus looked at him. “Hmm?”

“I want to get Sirius out of jail.”

Remus’ face fell. “Harry...I...even...even with this evidence...I doubt it would be enough to make the Ministry listen.”

Harry nodded. “I know. Dad didn’t like the Ministry either.”

Remus looked surprised. “You know? Then what do you want to do?”

“I want to find Peter.” Harry said simply

Remus was startled. “What?...How?”

Harry shrugged. “I don’t know...yet. But if we find Peter, and get the Ministry to try him under veritaserum, we can prove that he was the secret keeper, not Sirius, and that he blew up the street and killed all those people. I mean, if they’d done that to Sirius, they could have proved that he wasn’t the secret keeper!”

Remus wasn't sure how to respond to the boy's statement. It was true. Sirius had, ultimately, been sent to Azkaban without a trial. Everyone believed Sirius had been the Secret Keeper, including himself, a fact which he was now, immensely ashamed of. Peter had fooled all of them! Remus felt his anger level rising. Harry could see this as well, and decided it was time for a change in topic.

Harry gave him a small smile. "I'm sorry, Uncle Mooney. I know there's nothing we can do right now, but maybe we can figure out something later."

Remus looked up. "Don't worry, Harry. We'll figure something out."

Harry gave him an innocent look. "Thanks, Uncle Mooney."

There was a moment of silence, before Remus spoke up. "So Harry, you live with your relatives' right?"

(Acting abilities, upset kid)

Harry's face fell, and a frown crossed it. "Yeah." He grumbled. "But I wish I didn't." he pouted.

Remus was surprised at his nephew's attitude. "What do you mean, Harry?"

Harry shrugged. "My relatives don't like me, and they really don't like magic. I don't even know why they took me in, in the first place."

A look of concern crossed Remus' face. "What do you mean 'they don't like you'?"

Harry shrugged again. "They just don't. They think I'm weird, a freak. I can't wait to go to Hogwarts!"

Remus looked shaken. "Do they actually call you that, Harry?" Harry nodded. "What...I mean...How do they treat you?"

"Huh?"

“I mean, do they...do they hurt you?”

Harry bit his bottom lip. He really didn't want to tell his uncle just what went on in that house those last ten years. He decided to only tell part of it.

“Uh, not...not really.” He lied. “They make me cook and clean. Sometimes they get mad at me, and lock me in the cupboard or don't feed me, but its okay cause I can always sneak food from the kitchen.”

Remus was horrified! “What do you mean cupboard!? They don't actually starve you, do they?!”

“Well...uh... the cupboards my...uh...room. It's where I sleep. And, uh...I mean, I can always find something to eat.”

Remus deadpanned. HE SLEPT IN A CUPBOARD! THEY STARVED HIM! DID THEY PHYSICALLY ABUSE HIM?

How could he have let this happened!? To his nephew!? To James' son!?

How could Dumbledore have let this happen!? Surely he knew what went on in that house! He knew everything!

Remus still felt incredibly guilty for not doing something, but he actually hated Dumbledore at that moment for allowing Harry to stay with those horrid people!

Well, that would change! Even a month ago, Remus wouldn't have felt he had the ability or the resources to care for Harry, even a month ago, but now...He would do whatever it took to make sure Harry NEVER saw those people again! His thoughts were interrupted by a small voice.

“Uncle Mooney?”

Remus slowly shook his head. “I'm sorry. I'm so sorry.”

Harry moved to sit next to him. He saw the guilt and anger on his Uncle's face.

"You didn't do anything wrong, Uncle Mooney."

Remus sighed. "That's just it, Harry. I didn't do anything. I...I should have insisted with Dumbledore to let me see you. I'm so sorry." Harry didn't say anything. He knew Remus needed to get this out. After a moment of silence, Remus finally spoke again.

"Harry, uh...how'd you like to come home with me?"

A big smile lit up his nephew's face. "Really?! That'd be awesome!" Harry threw his arms around his Uncle. "I love you, Uncle Mooney."

Remus looked surprised. "But you don't know me."

Harry shrugged. "In a way, I do. I never really knew my parents either, but I still love them."

Remus didn't know how to argue with his nephew's logic.

"Do...um...do we need to pick up any of your stuff?"

Harry pretended to think for a moment. "Uh, not really. All my clothes are just Dudley's old ones. I really don't have anything else. I brought a new truck today, and all my school supplies." Harry pointed to his trunk, and several bags scattered around it.

"Did you do this by yourself?"

Harry shrugged. "I'm used to doing things alone."

Another shot of guilt shot through Remus. "Did you...uh...get some clothes?"

Harry shook his head.

"Well, would it be alright if we went shopping? I need to pick up a few things anyway."

Harry smiled. "Sure."

Harry and Remus spent the next few hours in Diagon Alley. Harry bought a new child's wardrobe. His 'adult' wardrobe was safely hidden in one of the many compartments in his trunk. Harry loved being able to spend time with Remus again. Remus had died 4 years before the end of the war, during a Death Eater attack on Hogwarts. Ironically enough, it had been by a fellow werewolf.

At the end of the day, Remus apparated the tow of them back to his flat. After supper, Harry and Remus talked long into the night, until Harry drifted off to sleep on the couch. (A/N: Even if Harry has a 30-year-old mind, he still has and 11-year-old body. Kids go to sleep earlier then adults.)

As Remus covered his nephew with a light blanket, he vowed to protect Harry at all costs. He had made this same vow to James before he died, and because he had listened to Dumbledore, he had failed his best friend.

Well, he wouldn't fail again!

So, liked it? Hated it?

Next chapter, you'll see the official opening of the Unity Foundation. Should be up fairly quickly.

Unity Foundation Doors Open

The next morning, Harry was still asleep when Remus left for his first day of work. He left Harry a note, saying there was food in the fridge, and that he'd bring home supper that evening.

As soon as Harry heard Remus apparate out, he quickly opened his eyes and threw off the blanket. He summoned his trunk, and quickly donned his disguise. He would have to make sure he was back before Remus came home, but being the boss did have its advantages.

He flooded to his private office, and grabbed several folders off his desk, before making his way across the hall, and knocking on Fabian's office door.

"Come in." came the reply

"Good Morning." Harry greeted.

Fabian looked up. "Hey. You seem happy. I take it yesterday went well?"

Harry grinned. "It went great! Harry Potter is now currently under the protection of his Uncle Mooney."

Fabian smiled. "That's great, Harry."

Harry grinned mischievously. "Now we just need to get you reunited with your family."

Fabian frowned. "I...am seriously considering it."

"Good. Now, are we ready for today?"

Fabian sighed. "I think so. All the employees were told to report to the auditorium on the 8th floor."

"Alright, uh, did we manage to secure all the properties for the safe houses?"

“Griphook dropped off the final paperwork for the farm, and we’ve already closed on the first three homes. We’re still waiting to hear about one, and the other one has just about flat out refused to sell.”

Harry groaned. “The one out in Greenwich?”

Fabian nodded.

“Well, we may just have to find another location for that area.”

“Oh, I need your signature on this.” Handing Harry a thick folder.

Harry rolled his eyes. “If I never see another piece of paperwork again, I’d be happy. I can’t believe I have to go through another 7 years of school.”

Fabian chuckled. “At least you know you’ll do well this time around.”

“Uh, I hope so. I haven’t been in school in over 12 years. I know the advanced stuff because of the war, but re-learning all the basic theory...”

“I don’t know. You seemed to know your stuff about ward theory. You’ve done all of them yourself.”

“Like I said, advanced, plus necessity. During the war, if you didn’t have strong wards, you were as good as dead.”

“Well, I’m sure you’ll figure it out. Have you figured out a way to get out of the castle without Dumbledore’s knowledge?”

Harry nodded. “I finally figured it out. I can use the Room of Requirements to floo in and out. I’ll just make sure the room seals itself before I leave. That way, it appears I’m still within the castle.”

“Ingenious. I wish I’d known about that room when I was at Hogwarts.”

“Anyway, shall we go? It’s almost 9.”

Fabian nodded. The two of them made their way to the auditorium. All staff was assembled, and quietly chatting. Harry and Fabian made their way to the stage. Harry went to the microphone, while Fabian stood to the side.

Harry tapped the microphone. "Hello." All conversation ceased.

"Thank you. Good morning. How is everyone?" He got a few 'goods', and nods.

Harry chuckled. "Not a morning bunch, huh? I completely understand. Anyway, let me start off by saying 'welcome' to each and everyone of you. For those of you who don't know me, or those of you who were smart enough to try and block my face from your memory..." laughter rippled around the room "...my name is Jacob Myers. I'm the CEO and president of this company, and seriously, if I haven't gotten around to meeting you personally, I sincerely apologize. I want to get to know each and every one of you. Unfortunately, my position requires me to travel quite a bit, so Mr. Richard Lawson, here is Vice President, and he'll be running the daily operations." A light applause followed as Fabian slightly waved.

"When my boss approached me last month, and presented me with the plans for this company, I thought it was a great idea. Then he told me I only have a month to do it. Well, that stopped me in my tracks. I was looking at this guy, and thinking that he'd gone off the deep end." more laughter. "Seriously, I didn't believe all this could be done in a month, but thanks to Mr. Lawson, and the Head of our Finance Department, Griphook, as well as several others, we pulled it off. Also, a lot of thanks goes to you guys. I know that many of you had to had to leave jobs very quickly, among other things, so I just want to say 'thank you' for working with us so efficiently, so that we were able to meet our deadlines"

"Each and everyone of you was hand selected. You are the best of the best in your fields. You wouldn't be here if you weren't. You all have remarkable talents and skills. Many of you have just entered the work force, and still have a great deal to learn, but honestly, I believe that applies to each and every one of us. I believe that we never stop

learning, and it is my hope that this company can provide an effective environment for you to advance and fine-tune your skills and talents, as well as provide you with valuable life experience.”

“I’ll be honest with you. None of you, and I’m talking to every department, none of you have an easy job. It’ll require a lot of hard work, a lot of hours, and a lot of dedication, but I hope that you’ll, at least, enjoy your work here. This company’s goal is to be a bridge between the wizarding world and the muggle world. It’s meant to help provide a better future for our children and grandchildren, for future generations. It will be a lot of work, but we can’t just sit back and hope for things to have to be united, and I want us to start within these walls. I don’t want you to just be co-workers. I want you to become a family, to look out for each other, to help each other.”

“I knew, from the start, when I started putting together this staff, that my...judgment...would be brought into question. I’ve already fielded several concerns, although I’m afraid the worst is yet to come. But let me assure you that I will handle all problems as they arise.”

“What I hope to accomplish here...may...bring about retaliation. If anyone, and I do mean anyone, tries to threaten or intimidate you, or your family, I beseech you to please report it directly to Mr. Lawson, and he will get the message back to me. Everything will be kept completely confidential. One or both of us will sit down with you personally, and figure out the best course of action. Trust me, when I say that we both have experience in dealing with these types of problems, and neither of us will tolerate tyranny or threats from anyone.”

“As I said, I want this company to become a family, and families look out for each other. Now, on the subject of family; personally, I believe that family is the most important thing in this world. People are the only things that make this life worth living, and there are all kinds of families. So, on that note, I don’t want this job to cause a strain on your family time. Many of you have young children, and those first years are so important in the nurturing department. Others of you have older children, and I know that many of them will be starting school within a few days, so in honor of that, work will not start until 10:30 on September 1st. I want you to take them to the train station,

and see them off. It's the little things in life that count. The small gestures. Enjoy your children while you can. The time with them is so precious."

"Well, I think I've taken up more than enough of your time for today. You've all been told where to report. Your Heads will go over everything else. If you have any questions or need to discuss anything with me, personally, I will be here today and tomorrow. Unfortunately, I have to fly out on another job tomorrow night, but if I can help you in any way, please don't hesitate to ask."

"Now, that I've talked your heads off..." light laughter "...I'll let you go to your Heads, and let them talk your heads off. Once again, welcome, and I truly hope you enjoy it here."

As he finished speaking, people slowly rose, and started making their ways to their respective audience.

Fabian came up behind him. "Nice speech." He commented

"I meant every word of it."

"I know. That's the scary part."

"Don't give me that. You'd do the same thing."

"I know, but I'm not sure I'd succeed. You will. Not would, will."

Harry grinned. "Thanks, I appreciate that."

At that moment, a cough interrupted them. The two men turned around.

"Remus, how are you?"

"Oh, pretty good actually. I enjoyed your speech. You don't hear stuff like that very often."

"Well, I meant it."

“Yes, well, I’d actually like to discuss something with you.”

“Okay.”

“Well, actually it may take a bit of explanation, and I need...”

“Of course. How about lunch time? Around 11:30 or 12?”

Remus nodded.

“Just come to my office.”

“Thank you. I really appreciate it. Now, if you’ll excuse me. Mr. Lawson.” he greeted respectfully.

As soon as he was out of ear shot, Fabian spoke up. “What was that all about?”

“My guess, it’s probably about me, well my 11-year-old self. I was actually hoping Remus might come to me on this.”

Fabian gave him an incredulous look. “You actually hoped Remus would come see you about you?!”

“Well, where do you think part of my speech was directed?”

Fabian shook his head. “Ever since I met you, my life has been anything but dull.”

Harry laughed. “Thanks...I think. Well, I’m gonna go finish up this paperwork, then make rounds.”

“Alright, well I’ve got a few things to finish up before you ‘leave’ tomorrow.”

Ask and ye shall receive

Harry made his rounds, greeting the people he’d hired mere weeks ago, and introduced himself to the few employees he had yet to meet

with. He was now back in his office, when there was a knock on the door.

“Come in.” The door opened.

“Ah, Remus, please come in. How did your first morning as Head go?”

Remus shrugged. “Okay, I guess. It’s different being in charge.”

Harry nodded. “Indeed it is The burden of leadership. Very trying, but rewarding at times, but I have complete confidence in your ability to handle it.”

Remus slightly blushed at the praise.

“Now, what can I do for you?”

Remus fidgeted. “Well, about what you said this morning...”

“Yes?”

“Well, I was just presented with some information, and I’m not sure how to proceed.”

“Okay.”

“It’s about my nephew, well, he’s not my blood nephew, but he was the son of my best friend.”

Harry nodded, but didn’t interrupt. Remus proceeded to tell him everything he knew, without mentioning any names. At the end of the story, Harry frowned.

“Well, I completely agree with your decision not to allow the boy to return to those relatives. This is the type of situation our safe house division is designed for. So what exactly would you like us to do? We can take him in...”

Remus shook his head. "No, that's not where I was going. I want guardianship. Sirius and I swore to James that we would protect Harry should anything happen. I'm sorry to say that I miserably failed him."

Harry put on a pretend look of surprise. "Sirius? Harry? James? Who is your nephew, Remus?"

Remus could have kicked himself. "Therein lies the problem. My nephew is Harry Potter."

Harry raised a curious eyebrow. "Really? And you said 'you and Sirius'; Sirius Black? I thought he betrayed the Potters?"

Remus shook his head. "I thought so too. It turns out it was another friend of ours." He pulled out the letter, and handed it over.

Harry quickly read over it, before setting it down. "Well, everyone knows the Potter's story, but this is certainly a different take on it. This indicates that Mr. Black was the named guardian. Whose decision was it to place him with his muggle relatives?"

"That's the other problem. Albus Dumbledore made that decision, then kept everyone away from him all these years. I've begged Dumbledore to let me see him so many times over the years, but every time, he's insisted that Harry was safest, and that it would be better to wait until he started Hogwarts. Well, like an idiot, I listened to him. He had to have known what was going on in that house, yet he did nothing! And I know that if I don't do something drastic, he'll insist that Harry go back to those horrid people."

Harry nodded. "I only know Albus Dumbledore by reputation, but I know how he operates. Frankly, I don't think the grandfatherly façade suits him. Alright Mr. Lupin, we will help you gain guardianship..." Remus looked up, surprise on his face. "It shouldn't be too hard. You meet all of the qualifications for guardianship. We had to be screened for the same thing in order to open the safe houses. From what you said, his legal guardian is his aunt. The main step will be getting her to relinquish her rights as guardian. After that, I don't think it should be too difficult."

Remus was shocked. "It's that simple?"

"It's that simple. There's a lot of paperwork and legalities, but once you get past that, it's not too bad. Now, aside from your nephew, would you like us to help you prove Mr. Black's innocence?"

Remus' head jerked. "You can do that?!"

Harry smirked. "All we can do is try, but...our lawyers are the best, and they're not afraid to raise hell, nor do they lie back and take any crap from the Ministry."

Remus was shell shocked. For the millionth time this month, he asked himself if this was real.

Remus shook his head. "That would be...great. My nephew believes we'd have to find Peter, if he's really alive, before we could prove Sirius' innocence."

"Well, it would probably help. We can put out feelers for him. Is there anything else?"

Remus shook his head 'no'.

"Alright, well I'll contact one of our lawyers by the name of Karin McAlistor. She knows the Magical and Muggle laws backwards and forwards."

Remus looked surprised. "I've heard that name. Wasn't her maiden name Parkinson?"

Harry nodded. "Yes, she's the sister to Caleb Parkinson. I believe he has a child starting at Hogwarts this year. If anyone can help you, she can."

Remus was still shell shocked, but stuck out his hand. "I don't know how to thank you."

Harry smiled and shook it. "You don't have to. I told you, this company is a family. These are the kind of problems we're here to help with."

The Lawyer

True to his word, Remus received a call from Karin McAlister right before the end of the day. She requested that Remus stop by her office that evening, and to bring Harry along.

Harry cut out from work early, and made it home with just 30 minutes before Remus got home.

Remus found his nephew curled up on the couch, reading one of his school books.

Harry truly was studying. Even though he knew that he could take his NEWTS right now, and pass with some of the highest scores in the history of Hogwarts, not to mention, thanks to Voldemort, he had more Dark Arts knowledge than any person currently in existence, it had been years since he had studied first year theory, and he knew he needed a refresher course.

As his uncle popped in, Harry plopped down the book, and gave his uncle a big hug. "Hey, Uncle Mooney. How was work?"

Remus smiled. "It was fine. How was your day?"

Harry shrugged. "I started reading my Hogwarts books. I can't wait to get sorted! I really hope I get into Gryffindor!"

Remus grinned, and ruffled his nephew's naturally messy hair. "I doubt you could be anywhere else."

'You'd be surprised.' Harry thought, but didn't say anything.

"Uh, Harry, I need to talk with you about something."

Harry nodded. "Okay."

“Take a seat.” Harry did, and Remus proceeded to tell him part of what he had in mind.

“So, I could come live with you?!” he asked excitedly.

Remus nodded. “When you’re not at Hogwarts.”

“And I wouldn’t have to go back to the Dursleys?”

“No, but first we have to go see this lawyer, and she has to make everything legal.”

“Alright, let’s go now!” he said excitedly

Remus chuckled. “How about you get some shoes on, then we’ll go.”

Remus apparated them to the address he’d been given. They were greeted by a secretary, and were told that Ms. McAlister was expecting them. As they entered a large comfortable office, the woman behind the desk stood up, and greeted them.

“Mr. Lupin, I presume. Please come in. And this must be Harry.” Bending down to the child’s level.

Harry shook her hand. “It’s very nice to meet you.”

“You too.” She responded.

She smiled. “Please, take a seat. Now, I’ve started looking into the issue of custody. Your boss has informed me of your ‘condition’, Mr. Lupin, but he has also provided proof that they are providing you with the necessary materials to control that condition, therefore you should pose no threat to the boy while he’s under your care. In addition, Mr. Myers has already provided proof of your job status as well as your financial income. Now, I will need proof of a permanent address. Can you provide that?”

Remus nodded. “I just started renting a three bedroom flat in magical London.”

“Excellent. Now, I understand there was some neglect in the case of the last relatives.”

Remus nodded.

“Well, I’m afraid I’m going to need some documented proof. I’d like Harry to talk with one of our child psychologists, if you have no objections.”

Remus shook his head, but Harry frowned. This is not what he had expected. His acting was really going to be put to the test.

She talked a bit more about the legalities of transferring guardianship, before she moved on to the second subject.

“Now, Mr. Myers briefly touched on the subject of one Mr. Sirius Black, and his possible innocence.”

Harry decided to play the hurt/ignored child. “MY GODFATHER IS INNOCENT!”

Karin looked up, surprised. “Really Mr. Potter? And what makes you say that if the Ministry believes he’s guilty?”

“This!” he said, thrusting a letter onto her desk. “And the Ministry’s a bunch of idiots!” he huffed, folding his arms across his chest

The two adults laughed at the child’s theatrics.

“I can’t say I entirely disagree with you, Mr. Potter.”

“I have a similar letter, Mrs. McAlister.”

Remus handed over his letter as well.

“Karin, please. And it’s Ms. My husband died several years ago.”

“Oh, I’m sorry.”

"Thank you. I truly miss him, but...life goes on, and my work takes up a great deal of my time."

Harry and Remus kept quiet for a minute, while she read over the letters. She finished the second one, and set it down.

"Well, this is interesting. This type of information should have light when he was questioned under veritaserem."

"That's just it. I don't believe he ever was. As far as I know, he never even received a fair trial. Everyone believed he was guilty, myself included, and they chunked him straight into Azkaban."

"Well, I can certainly look into the court's records on that, but what about the incident with the muggles?"

Remus went on to explain Harry's theory about Peter framing Sirius. "So you think he escaped?"

Remus nodded. "Yes, you see...he, uh...he was an unregistered animagus, a rat. We believe he cut off his own finger, transformed, and escaped into the sewers."

She raised an eyebrow. "Well, that is interesting. I can see why you believe it would be valuable to find Mr. Pettigrew. Okay, Mr. Lupin. I can get you started on these papers, and I'd like Harry to come with me. I called in a favor to a friend of mine. She's an excellent child psychologist, and she can provide us with the necessary report to transfer guardianship. I realize that Harry will be starting Hogwarts in a few days, and I'd like to give you the security of guardianship before he leaves. Mr. Myers alluded to the fact that Professor Dumbledore might try to interfere in proceedings, so I will make sure that everything is ironclad."

"That would be most appreciated, Ms. McAlister. Karin."

She smiled at him, and handed him a pen. She walked around the desk, and held out a hand.

"Could you come with me, Harry?" He nodded.

Harry spent the next three hours being asked every question known to mankind. They covered his life, his relatives, relationship with other kids, and so on. The psychologist, Mrs. Willis, was a distinguished woman in her early 40's was nice enough, but Harry thought she was a bit abrupt. Perhaps it was just her directness that he noticed.

Much like Karin, she didn't beat around the bush. She got right to the heart of the matter, which Harry liked. This was in one reason he and the 'Unity Foundation' had had become clients of Malcom, Mayes, and McAlistor. One of the most prestigious and most expensive law firms in Greater Britain. They had one of the highest success rates, and had expert lawyers in every field of law, both magical and muggle.

Anyway, by the time Mrs. Willis got through interrogating him, Harry felt like doing two things. The first was hiring her for the safe house division as one of his psychologists, or perhaps for the security division as a professional interrogator. The second thing he felt like doing was writing a book, entitled 'How to fool a child psychologist in three really difficult steps'.

His acting skills were becoming forcibly honed, and he knew they would be put to an even bigger test, once at Hogwarts. He and Remus didn't leave until 10 o'clock that night, with Ms. McAlistor's promise to be in touch within the next 48 hours.

Flying Out

The next morning was very similar to the previous one. Harry pretended to be asleep 'till Remus left then quickly followed. Today was his 'last day' before he 'flew out'. He would be back in a couple of weeks, unless otherwise necessary. The day passed quickly. Harry dealt with several matters that had come up since yesterday, and Fabian would be owling him with anything else that needed his attention.

Harry had also provided Fabian and Griphook with a very special piece of parchment. If there was ever an emergency, all they had to do was write a message on the parchment. The message would

immediately disappear and reappear on Harry's parchment, or vice versa. He also provided them with a set of communication mirrors.

He hadn't been in business long enough to attract the Ministry's or Malfoy's attention, but he knew that it was just a matter of time, and he would need to know about it as soon as it happened.

Harry said an official 'goodbye' to all of his Heads and Directors, reminding each of them, that if they had any problems, that Mr. Lawson could always get a hold of him. He took a bit of time with Remus, wishing him the best of luck, and saying that Ms. McAlister would be in contact with him if there were any problems.

Harry's final goodbyes were to Griphook and Fabian, even though he knew he would be receiving owls from each of them several times a week.

"Enjoy being a kid again, Harry." Fabian said.

Harry rolled his eyes. "Yeah, and everything that goes with it."

Fabian just smirked.

Horcruxes

Harry spent the next few days on a very important mission. While Remus was at work, Harry was left to his own devices. Now was the time to focus on his main reason he had come back. To destroy Voldemort. To prevent the breakout of war. To save everyone he loved. And the first step to that began with one word. 'Horcruxes'.

He already had one, and he knew the other 4 were. Dumbledore had been right about one thing,. Tom had planned on using Harry's murder to make his 6th Horcrux.

He now found himself in the ruins of the Gaunt house. He pulled out an enchanted dagger, and slid it across his palm, allowing several drops to fall on the shields that protected Slytherin's ring.

Harry had learned from Voldemort's memories, that Tom had put in a backup system, incase he ever needed to retrieve his precious Horcruxes. A few drops of Voldemort's own blood, drawn by a specially enchanted dagger would nullify all the protection charms. It turned out that Harry's blood worked the worked the same way, thanks to the night Voldemort had initially tried to kill him.

Now that the horcrux was released from its protection spells, Harry slowly poured the 'soul killing' potion over it, then drew his wand, and began chanting. The horcrux started to smoke and hiss. All of a sudden, a loud cry was omitted from the object, before all fell silent. The ring was no longer a horcrux.

Harry had already performed this ritual on the locket at Grimmauld Place, as well as Hufflepuff's cup that had been hidden in the graveyard where Tom's father and grandparents were buried. While there, he had also taken the liberty of completely disintegrating the bones of Tom's father, and replacing them with mere sticks, transfigured to simply look like bones.

Now, he only had two to deal with. One, he would have to wait until he got to Hogwarts to deal with. He couldn't understand why he hadn't realized the location of that particular horcrux any sooner then he had in his original timeline. The Chamber of Secrets was a perfect hiding place, and it was a cruel irony that it held Gryffindor's wand.

The second one would be a problem, or would it? It was currently in the possession of Malfoy Sr. He couldn't just walk up to Lucius, and say 'Hey, you have a horcrux in your possession. Could I have it, please.' Uh, no. That wouldn't work. So how could he get it?

He sat brainstorming for a minute. He couldn't just apparate in. Those wards were some of the strongest ones around; a few of them, even stronger then the ones protecting Hogwarts. How, how, how? Then it hit him!

"Dobby." He called out.

Nothing.

He called out again. "Dobby."

For a moment, there was nothing but silence, then a small pop echoed in the air.

"Who summons Dobby?" the house elf asked quietly, a hint of fear in his voice

"That would be me, Dobby." Harry answered evenly

The house elf spun around. "Who is your sir? And why does Dobby feel drawn to you?"

"My name is Harry Potter, Dobby."

The house elf's eyes went big. "Harry Potter, sir. Dobby has heard of your greatness, but how does sir know me?"

"That's a long story, Dobby. Let's just say we've met before, but you wouldn't remember. I need your help Dobby. I know you are bound to the Malfoy family."

Dobby squeaked in fear. "Ye...yes sir. What does sir need?"

"I know you don't like Voldemort..."

The elf gasped. "Please don't say that name, sir."

Harry sighed. "Okay, I know you don't like the Dark Lord. I need your help to stop him."

Dobby burst into tears. Harry just let him. He was used to Dobby's theatrics.

When he finally calmed down, he finally managed to get out, "But Dobby is just a house elf sir. No wizard has ever asked for Dobby's help. Dobby can't fight against He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named."

Harry shook his head. "I don't want you to fight Dobby. I just need you to get something for me. Your master is a follower of the Dark Lord."

He left an object in your master's possession. I need you to get it for me. It's a small black diary with the name, T. M. Riddle on the front of it. Do you know where it is?

"How does sir know this? My master hasn't looked at it in years."

The house elf quickly clamped a hand over his mouth, and started beating himself with a stick.

Harry quickly snatched the stick away, and grabbed Dobby by the collar.

His voice remained calm. "Good, then your master won't miss it. Can you get it for me? It's important, Dobby."

Dobby started to sob, but nodded. "Good, Dobby. Now look, if you'll do this for me, I'll make you this promise. I will do everything within my power to free you from Lucius Malfoy."

Dobby's eyes went big. "But Dobby is bound to the Malfoy family..."

"I know, Dobby, but you don't deserve to be treated like that. I will free you from Lucius, it just may take some time, but I really need that diary!"

Dobby burst into tears again, so Harry just waited. The tears finally subsided, and Dobby looked up.

"Dobby will get it for Harry Potter, if he believes it will truly help."

"I assure you, it will."

"Then Dobby will be right back." And with that, he popped out

Now? He was getting it now? Harry hadn't expected this. He figured that it would at least take some time before he could work out a plan for Dobby to snatch it. But maybe...?

Without warning, the little elf popped back in, holding the sinister, yet innocent looking object.

“Is this what Harry Potter wants?” Dobby asked, holding up the book.

Harry could’ve kissed Dobby at that moment. This had just made his job a lot easier.

“Yes, Dobby. Thank you.” He answered, taking the book. He felt the dark magic radiating off it.

“Does young sir need anything else?”

“Just one thing. I need to place a spell on you that won’t allow you to tell anyone of what you’ve done today or even that you’ve seen me.”

“Dobby would never tell sir.”

“I know Dobby, and I believe that, but this spell will prevent you from telling, even if you’re ordered by your master. And if you’re ever asked where the diary is, you’ll be able to answer that you don’t know. You’ll still remember everything, you just won’t be able to tell anyone, but I need your permission. The spell requires your consent in order to work properly.”

“Then Harry Potter has it.”

“Thank you, Dobby. Now just hold still for a moment.” Harry drew his wand, and quietly started chanting. The magic swirled around the house elf, lifting him several feet into the air, before gently setting him back down.

“It’s done. Now Dobby, I know I can’t order you to do anything, but please don’t punish yourself for this. You did the right thing, and you’ve helped to prevent a lot of deaths. And I will keep my promise to you.”

Once again Dobby started wailing. “Harry Potter is a truly great wizard. Dobby will never forget his kindness.”

“And I shall never forget your bravery. Now go before you get into any trouble.”

The house elf bowed low, before leaving with a pop.

Harry relished in the silence, before turning his attention back to the diary.

A potion and ritual later, the silence was broken by the loud cry of a dying soul.

As the scream ceased, Harry let out a sigh of relief. That particular horcrux could never hurt him or his friends again.

Now he just had the last one to deal with, and he knew he could get to that one.

Lawyers and Love?

The day before Harry was supposed to go to Hogwarts, Harry and Remus received final confirmation from Karin McAlister that Remus had official, ironclad guardianship. Petunia Dursley had gladly signed away all of her rights to 'the boy', and Remus was now his legal guardian in both the magic and muggle worlds. Every thing was perfectly legal, and Karin assured both of them, that there was nothing Albus could do to change that. Karin had also made sure that the records were sealed from everyone else, until Harry came of age. Karin also confided that once she had filed her report with the muggle authorities, charges had immediately been filed against the Dursleys.

The night Karin brought them the news, Remus invited her to go out with them to celebrate. Surprisingly, she accepted. The three of them went to a local seafood restaurant, and had a nice sit down dinner. The conversation was light and pleasant. Harry watched the two adults as they talked. Unless Harry was very much mistaken, there was quite a bit of subtle flirting from both parties. Harry was surprised that this was coming from Remus, who had usually been the quiet type, but he hoped that the last few weeks had given him more confidence in himself.

He truly hoped Remus found someone special this early in the game, and Karin, he thought, would be good for him. She had only been two

years behind him in Hogwarts, she was a successful lawyer, and as a big plus, she already knew Remus' condition. Plus, she was HOT. She was about 5' 8", tall and slender, had shoulder length, light brown hair with blond highlights running through it that fell into loose curls around her shoulders, framing her face. She had some of the bluest eyes Harry had ever seen, and very delicate facial features. At first glance, no one would suspect that she was a kick-ass lawyer.

Yes, things were definitely looking up for both Harry and Remus, and Karin was working hard on Sirius' case. Harry hoped for something major to happen, at least by Christmas.

I know this chapter is longer than my others, but I really didn't think you'd mind. Anyway, the next chapter may take a few days, but Harry will finally get to go to Hogwarts. Thanks for reading, and let me know what you think.

Midnight Star 25

Hogwarts: Ready or Not!

The next morning, Harry awoke to the wonderful smell of bacon. After Remus and Harry had a huge breakfast, Remus apparated the two of them and all of Harry's stuff and Hedwig to Platform 9 3/4.

As they made their way through the barrier, Harry immediately spotted several familiar red heads, as did Remus.

"Come on, Harry. I want to introduce you to someone."

Harry nodded, and followed his uncle.

"Molly, Arthur." The two of them turned around.

"Remus, good to see you. I didn't realize you had children at Hogwarts." (Arthur)

Remus shook his head. "I don't. My nephew is starting this year. Harry, I'd like you to meet Molly and Arthur Weasley. They work for the same company I do. Molly, Arthur, my nephew, Harry Potter."

A look of surprise crossed both of their faces, but Harry took it in stride.

"Nice to meet you, Mr. and Mrs. Weasley." He said, politely

Molly came out of her surprise first. "Nice to meet you too, dear. Our son Ron is starting this year as well."

"Yes Harry, it's nice to meet you. I'm sure you'll enjoy Hogwarts. It's a wonderful school."

Harry flashed him a smile. "Thank you, Mr. Weasley. I've read a lot about it, and Uncle Remus has told me lots of stories, although I think I'll steer clear of the Whomping Willow and the giant squid."

The adults chuckled at this.

"Well, if you'll excuse us, I want to get Harry settled."

Arthur nodded. "Of course, see you at work."

Remus and Harry bid the two of them good day, and Harry made a beeline for the same compartment he had had in his original timeline. Luckily, it was still empty. After all of Harry's stuff was situated, Remus gave his uncle a big hug.

"Thanks for everything, Uncle Mooney. My life's become ten times better since I met you."

Remus couldn't hide a smile. "Same goes for me, kiddo. I'm gonna miss you, but the Christmas holidays will be here before you know it."

Harry grinned. "Can we get a big Christmas tree and decorate the house?"

Remus ruffled his hair. "We can do whatever you want, and start making up that Christmas list."

"You too."

Remus laughed. "You're too much. I don't know what I'm gonna do without you around."

"Oh...I think Ms. Karin might be interested in filling some of that time." Harry said, innocently.

At this, a slight blush crossed Remus' face. Harry just smirked. At that, the one minute warning sounded. Remus gave his nephew one final hug, before stepping off the train, and closing the door.

As the train started up, two red heads came around the corner. Harry decided to have some fun.

He pushed the window down, and called, "Bye Uncle Mooney. See you at Christmas."

His uncle gave him one final wave, before apparating away. He pushed the window back up, before turning around to the two stunned red heads.

“Hi.” Harry said cheerfully.

‘Hey’

‘You’re’

‘Is it?’

‘It is my dear brother.’

“What?” asked Harry, suppressing a grin

“Harry Potter!”

“Harry smirked. “That’s my name. Don’t wear it out. And you two are the famous Weasley twins.”

The twins looked stunned.

‘Gred, I’

‘think our reputation’

‘proceeds us.’

‘I concur my dear Forge’

‘So, Harry’

‘How do you’

‘know us?’

Harry shrugged. “My uncle works with your parents and your brother. (oops, he really wasn’t supposed to know about Bill. Oh well, they

didn't know that) They mentioned that they had a couple of pranksters at Hogwarts. It wasn't hard to figure it out from there."

"So your uncle works for that new company too?" Harry nodded.

"Harry...you called your uncle something. What was it?"

Harry suppressed a grin. "What do you mean?" he asked innocently

George fidgeted. "I mean, you said Uncle something."

Harry put on a look of confusion. "You mean Mooney? That was his nickname while at Hogwarts."

Looks of pure shock crossed the twin's faces. "You say he's your uncle?" questioned Fred

"Well, honorary uncle. He was one of my dad's best friends while at Hogwarts. There were 4 of them that made up a group called the Marauders. My dad was the leader."

If possible, the twin's eyes got even bigger.

"And your dad's nickname?"

"Oh, Prongs." Harry could tell that he had just earned a new respect in the twin's eyes.

Fred turned to George, and George gave him a slight nod. Fred pulled out a familiar piece of parchment.

"Do you know what this is?"

Harry put on a look of surprise. "Of course. How'd you get it?"

He drew his wand, and tapped the map. "I solemnly swear that I am up to no good."

The Marauder's Map slowly appeared. He tapped it again. "Mischief Managed."

They were in awe.

“Uncle Mooney thought it had been lost for good.”

Fred shook his head. “Filch had it.”

“You mean the caretaker?”

“Yeah, steer clear of him. He hates kids.”

Harry nodded. “Hey...um...guys...I’d like to propose an exchange.”

Fred and George looked at each other.

‘We’re’

‘Listening.’

“Well, I got into my parents vault this summer, and some of the things my dad left were a series of prank journals.” He pulled a thick journal out of the pocket of his robes. “I’d like to exchange the map for the journal.”

He handed the journal over to the twins. As they flipped through it, their famous mischievous smirks crossed their faces.

‘This is’

‘great stuff.’

‘And we’

‘Already have’

‘the map’

‘memorized.’

They looked at each other. “We agree.” they said together

'Pleasure doing'

'business with you.'

Harry smirked. "Maybe I'll pull out some of those other journals, and I could introduce you to my uncle sometime...just if you're interested."

The twins looked like Christmas had come early.

'We may'

'be taking you'

'up on'

'your offer.'

At that moment, Ron opened the door to the car.

'Hey'

'little brother.'

'Well, Harry'

'we'll be'

'seeing you.'

'Stay out'

'of trouble'

'Ickle'

'Ronnikins.'

Ron went beat red, as the door closed. Harry quickly pocketed the map.

“Mind if I sit here. Everywhere else is full.”

“Of course.” said Harry, happily

“I’m Ron Weasley, and I guess you’ve already met Fred and George.”

“I’m Harry. Harry Potter.”

Ron’s eyes got big.

“Do you...you really?”

Harry grinned and pushed his bangs aside. “Yeah.”

“Wicked!” Ron grinned back.

At that moment, the candy cart came by. “Anything off the trolley dears?”

Ron’s ears went red. “No thanks. I’m good.” holding up a package of sandwiches.

Harry frowned. Obviously the Weasleys had informed their children of their new positions, but not their financial status, although he did notice that Ron wore new clothes and robes. Well, the company had only been open a week, plus they probably didn’t want their kids to flaunt it.

Just like the first time around, Harry bought all types of candy, and got Ron to trade him a sandwich for some. Before long, the sandwiches lay forgotten, and Ron brought up the subject of Quittich, and this time, Harry wasn’t in the dark, nor did he pretend to be. Harry saw this as the true start of their friendship, and Harry had no intention of changing that.

During their conversation, Ron pulled out the one person Harry had expected.

“This is Scabbers, by the way. My parents...uh...got me a new wand.” He proudly pulled out a brand new wand. 9 ½ inches, Maple wood, Dragon Heartstring.”

Harry wanted to strangle the rat in front of him, but he knew that now was not the time. His time would come.

“Hey, Fred and George gave me a spell to turn him yellow. Want to see?”

Harry smiled. “Sure.”

But before he could say anything, the door opened.

“Has anyone seen a toad. A boy named Neville’s lost one.”

“No.” answered Ron

“Oh, are you doing magic? Let’s see then.”

“Sunshine, Daisies , Butter Mellow, turn this stupid, fat rat yellow.” Nothing happened.

“Er, Ron. If Fred and George gave you that spell, I think they were just messing with you. It’s not like any spell I’ve read about.”

“Oh, you read ahead?” Hermione asked curiously.

Harry nodded. “I was raised in the Muggle world. I didn’t want to get behind when I started Hogwarts.”

Hermione nodded. “I know, there’s so much to learn. I’m Hermione Granger, by the way.”

“Harry Potter.”

“Really? I’ve read all about you.”

Harry nodded. “Don’t believe everything you read though.”

Hermione looked confused. "Why not?"

Harry sighed. Same old Hermione.

"Have you heard the saying that 'history is written by the victor'?"

Hermione nodded.

"Well, everything you read in those books is written by a person, and it comes from only one point of view. My story, for example, only had one victor. (well, sorta he thought) and I was only a baby at the time. After that, I've lived in the muggle world for the last 10 years. I've never given an interview, and I really don't remember anything, except for some flashes of green light, so everything in those books is pure speculation. It's like another muggle saying. Take every truth with a grain of salt."

Hermione frowned, worried that her precious books could fail her.

Harry chuckled. "Don't worry Hermione. I'm not saying everything's wrong; just to be discerning."

She nodded.

"Oh, this is Ron Weasley. We're both 1st years."

"Pleasure." She said to Ron. "I am too. Well, I'd better keep looking..."

"Wait. Do you know the toad's name?"

She shook her head. "Let me go find out."

A minute later she was back, dragging a nervous Neville along.

"This is Neville Longbottom."

"Hi, Neville. I'm Harry Potter."

Surprise crossed his face, but shook Harry's outstretched hand. "Hi."

“I’m Ron Weasley.” Neville greeted him as well.

“Are your parents Alice and Frank?” Harry questioned.

Neville went red. “Uh, yeah...how’d you know?”

“Oh, my parents mentioned their names in some of the stuff they left me. I think our mums were pretty good friends in school.”

Neville looked surprised.

“So, what’s your toad’s name?” asked Harry, changing the subject.

“Uh, Trevor.”

Harry nodded, and raised his wand. “Accio Trevor the Toad.”

A second later, the toad zoomed into Harry’s waiting hand.” He handed the toad to his owner.

“Wow!” exclaimed Hermione “Where’d you learn that!?”

Harry shrugged. “I had a lot of time to read this summer. My muggle relatives don’t like magic, and they really don’t like me, so I just try to stay out of their way.”

“What do you mean they don’t like you?”

So Harry told them all about his life before a month ago. Cooking, cleaning, the cupboard, Harry Hunting, and so on. Needless to say, by the end of his explanation, his friends faces were pale.

“How horrible.” stated Hermione.

“Even my brothers aren’t that bad.” added Ron.

Harry smiled at his friends. “Don’t worry guys. I don’t ever have to go back there again. I met my Uncle Remus. He’s a wizard, and really nice. I get to live with him now.”

Looks of relief crossed their faces.

“So, what houses do you think you’ll be in? Both of my parents were in Gryffindor, so that’s what I’m hoping for.”

Ron nodded. “That’s where all my family’s from too. You could say...I’ve kinda got a lot to live up to.”

“My dad was in Gryffindor, but my mum was in Ravenclaw.”

“Well, I’m aiming for Gryffindor as well, although Ravenclaw wouldn’t be bad.”

The four 1st years chatted for a few more minutes before the conductor announced they would arrive in 5 minutes.

This seemed to be getting off to a better start than the first time around. Ron seemed less hostile towards Hermione, and Neville seemed a bit more open, although Harry attributed that to the fact that he had actually talked to him this time.

As they got off the train, Harry heard a familiar voice. “1st YEARS, 1st YEARS, THIS WAY!”

Harry longed to give his old friend a big hug, but he hadn’t officially met this Hagrid.

Harry and Ron quickly grabbed a boat. “Neville, Hermione over here.” The four of them boarded the boat. The castle was just as breathtaking.

Harry now found himself on the stairs waiting to go in, when a familiar voice spoke up.

“It’s true then. Harry Potter has come to Hogwarts.”

Harry groaned. Couldn’t Draco leave well enough alone? Draco had actually become a powerful ally for the Light, but it had taken the

murder of his mother at his father's hand to make him switch. Harry hoped it wouldn't come to that this time.

"What do you want, Malfoy?" he asked lazily

Draco wore an arrogant smirk, pleased that Harry knew who he was. "So you've heard of me. Then you know my families one of the finest pureblood families within the wizarding world."

Ron snorted. "Oh, a Weasley." he sneered. "You'll soon find that some wizarding families are better than others Potter. I can help you there." He held out his hand, but Harry didn't take it.

"Thanks, but I'm not interested in any thing you have to offer." He stated, coolly.

Malfoy looked like he had been slapped. His features went hard. "You're making a mistake, Potter. If you think the Weasleys..."

That was enough! Harry didn't want this to escalate into a heated debate, hexing, or fist fight. With a brief wave of hand at his side, he silently cast a 'phobos' curse on Draco.

Draco suddenly went silent. Harry could see that his eyes were slightly glazed over as the spell took effect. After a moment, the fear was evident in his eyes, and he slowly backed away, staring at Harry in complete dread. Harry quickly ended the curse.

The 1st years couldn't figure out what had just happened. All they saw was that Draco was about to insult the Weasleys, then he got quiet and backed away.

"What just happened?" whispered Ron

Harry shrugged. "I don't know."

Okay, so he did, but that was beside the point. Hopefully, Draco would think twice before messing with him again. Phobos was a dark curse, and if used properly, could cause nasty effects. Harry had only used a mild form on Draco. At full strength, the spell acted much like

a dementor, minus the soul sucking. It made the recipient relieve their worst memories, and if held on them long enough, could make them go insane. Harry had only made Draco relieve one memory, but he knew which one it was, and he knew it'd be enough to shut him up, and take a good look at his own family, before he started putting down others.

Before Ron could ask another question, Professor McGonagall came up, and all talking ceased.

"We're ready for you now. Follow me." They were lead into the Great Hall, where the Hat was ready with this year's song.

One by one, they were called to be sorted. When Harry's name was called, he ignored the whispers from the older students. 'That was bloody annoying enough the first time around' he mused exasperated.

'Ah, Mr. Potter. I've been looking forward to meeting you. Plenty of cour...well...what do we have here? My, my, my. I can see that you've already been sorted, but how can that be?'

'I know Occulmentry shields don't work on you. You tell me.' Harry retorted

Harry felt the hat searching.

'A time-traveler. Yes, and I can see why.'

'I had nothing to lose. Worst-case scenario, everything happened just as before.'

'I see. I also see that you posses knowledge that's not your own. May I ask if that comes from the immediate past or the future?'

'The future...during the final battle. I'm still not sure how or why that happened.'

'Indeed. You certainly hold to an interesting set of morals. You could truly be in any house, but you have every quality for Slytherin...'

‘NO!’ he mentally screamed. He sighed. ‘No.’ he added more calmly. ‘I have to be in Gryffindor. Nearly everyone I care about is there, and I swear, I won’t corrupt the House.’

‘Ah, I see. No...I don’t suppose you will, and I suppose you have the right to decide.’

‘Thank you. But before you sort me, I need a favor. I need you to keep this under wraps. Only a select few know, but if Albus were to find out...’

‘Not to worry, Mr. Potter. I’m designed to keep everything confidential.’

‘That’s most appreciated. Oh, and one more thing. Ginny Weasley will be starting, and you’ll sort her into Gryffindor, but she’ll have a friend named Luna Lovegood. You’ll originally sorted her into Ravenclaw, but she’ll be absolutely miserable. Is it possible you might could sort her into Gryffindor. I think she and Ginny could really help each other.’

The hat probed his mind. ‘I see what you mean. I’ll suggest it to her, but in the end, each person has to make their own decision.’

‘Thank you. That’s all I ask.’

‘Well, I wish you luck in your endeavors. You play a dangerous game, meddling with fate itself.’

‘As I told Albus, it needs to be meddled with.’

The Hat chuckled. ‘You don’t agree with Albus.’

Harry huffed. ‘That’s the understatement of the year.’

The Hat laughed again. ‘Well, you’ll certainly keep things interesting around here. Your plan is certainly worthy of a Slytherin, but I’ll be seeing you in’

‘GRYFFINDOR’

The Gryffindor table erupted into applause, and, once again, the twins were yelling 'WE GOT POTTER'. Harry just shook his head.

The last of the students were sorted. He applauded as Ron became the last Gryffindor.

Dumbledore looked at him, a twinkle in his eye.

Harry just smiled, while reinforcing his Occulmentry shields. NO ONE was getting through. Not Voldemort, Albus, or Snape.

The feast passed without incident. Thanks to his shields, even Quirrell/Tom didn't get in.

Percy led the 1st years to the Common Room. During the feast, Harry had encouraged further conversation between himself, Hermione, Ron and Neville.

The three boys bid Hermione good night, and made their way to their dorm.

"I can't believe I made it into Gryffindor." Expressed Neville.

"It means you're supposed to be here, mate." said Harry, encouragingly "The sorting hat has never been wrong."

"Yeah, well, I just hope it makes my Gran happy."

Harry checked to make sure Ron was out of earshot.

"I know about your parents, Neville. I'm truly sorry. You know, we're kinda in the same boat. Our parents were unjustly taken from both of us."

Neville bit his lip. "Thanks. I...I guess that's true."

Harry gave him an encouraging smile. "Come on. We've got a big day tomorrow."

Neville nodded.

Before Harry went to bed that night, he wrote a brief letter to Remus.

Harry slept soundly that night. Hogwarts had been his first 'true' home, and no matter what the circumstances, he was back, if only for a moment.

I know that a lot of you did not want me to put Harry in Gryffindor, but as I said up top...please don't kill me. My story just would not have worked any other way, plus I wanted Harry to be a true Marauder.

To make up for this, I've got a little surprise in the next chapter.

Oh, and just a note. If you recognize the spell 'phobos', it's from the story Fallen by RememberMe2. I give her complete credit for that spell. I did change it up just a little bit though.

Hope you'll keep reading. Thanks.

Midnight Star 25

First Classes

Harry awoke early the next morning, grabbed his book bag and headed to the Owlery.

“Hedwig.” He called. “Want to take a letter to Remus?”

She affectionately nipped his finger, as she accepted the offered owl treat, before taking off with the letter.

Harry then made his way to the Great Hall. Students were just starting to file in. He noticed Hermione was already down, and made a beeline for her.

“Hi Hermione.” He greeted

“Hi. You’re up early.”

“No earlier than you.”

She shrugged. “I’m always up early.”

They made casual conversation, until Ron and Neville joined them.

“Morning.” Ron yawned

“Hey.” added Neville

It was then, that Professor McGonagall came down the table handing out the schedules.

“Look, we have transfiguration first.”

“Uh, I heard McGonagall’s really hard.”

“What else do we have today?”

“Charms, Defense, and Double Potions with the Slytherins.”

“Boy, that’s gonna be fun. Fred and George say Snape HATES Gryffindor, and always favors Slytherin.”

Transfiguration went much like the first time, just this time, he didn’t struggle with the assignment. He pretended to, until right at the very end, when he successfully pulled off a shiny, pointy needle. Hermione looked a little put out at sharing her limelight, and Ron kept demanding to know how he’d done it.

Charms was simple enough, just skull-crushing boring, since all they were doing was learning wrist movement.

Defense was on the same level. Quirrell stuttered through the whole class, although, at least Harry knew why this time. His time would come. Very, very soon.

Now came Potions. This was the class he’d been waiting for, yet also dreading. He knew what he had to do. He just wasn’t sure he wanted to do it, or if it would even work. Well, if it didn’t work, he could at least say he tried.

Snape swept in, his billowing black robes intimidating the class. He gave the same lecture about the ‘subtle art that is potion making’, then he turned on Harry.

“Harry Potter...our...new...celebrity.”

“Tell me Mr. Potter, what would I get if I added powdered root of asphodel to an infusion of wormwood?”

“Draught of the Living Dead, sir.” He answered without hesitation.

The silence was deafening. Even Snape blinked.

All of a sudden, Harry’s mind was assaulted with a strong thrust of Legilimency, but Harry’s shields held true.

“Where would you look if I asked you to find me a beazor?”

“In the stomach of a goat.” Harry replied evenly

“What’s the difference between Monkshood and Wolfsbane?”

“Nothing, sir. They’re the same plant. Muggle botanists call it aconite.”

“Now, sir, I have a question.” Snape’s attack on Harry’s mind faltered for a second.

“What?” he questioned dangerously.

“I have a question.” Harry repeated. “I read several potions books this summer, and I have a question on one of the potions I read about.”

Snape sneered. “Oh, and what might that be?”

“It’s about the Invigoration Draught. Its main purpose is to boost or invigorate the drinker’s magical core, which makes it a valuable potion going into battle or during a duel, although it’s often banned from official duels. But there is a downside to the potion. Once drunk, the effects wore off in about three hours, despite the dosage, leaving the drinker sluggish, depressed, and their magical core incredibly drained, and depending on the dosage, it can leave them in that state, anywhere from several hours to several days, and if drunken excessively over a long period of time, it can cause permanent damage to your core. Now, as I understand it, this mainly stems from the acid that’s being released when the essence of belladonna is added, then mixed with the armadillo bile, which also releases an acid. Wouldn’t it be more prudent to add a strong base that would be able to balance the acids out, and thereby nullifying the negative effects that it has on your body? Re’em Blood, for example. It’s a strong enough base, and once added, the blood would actually add an extra benefit of enhanced physical strength, which is what the blood is originally used for in the first place.”

The class was stunned, but Snape wore a look of triumph on his face.

“I don’t know WHO put you up to this, Potter. But you can tell them that their little theory has a big hole in it. IF you were to try and add Re’em Blood to that particular potion, your potion would not only turn

out to be dangerously unstable, but could cause the users magical core to explode, due to the interaction with the lovage, which is also a base, and reacts very poorly with many ingredients, including Re'em Blood."

Snape looked like he had just one a million galleons, but Harry wasn't finished.

"Not if you add it during the 5th cycle." He stated calmly.

"WHAT?"

"The 5th cycle. By that point, you've just added the belladonna, and the acid from it has risen to the top of the cauldron, but it's also put the lovage in a nirvana like state. Simply put, the lovage is temporarily suspended within the potion in a neutral capacity for about 5 minutes during the brewing. Add the Re'em Blood during that timeframe, then immediately add the armadillo bile before that time is up, neutralizing the acid, and the lovage won't be able to interact with the blood in anyway, or cause any nasty side effects."

He could see that Snape was analyzing what he had just said, before switching back to his blank mask.

"Mr. Potter, I don't know what you are trying to pull, or who put you up to it, but the both of you are gravely mistaken! 10 points from Gryffindor for wasting my time, and another 10 for disrupting my class. Now, quills out, and start copying the notes on the board!" With an angry flick of his wrist, a long list of notes appeared on the blackboard. "IMMEDIATELY!" he shouted

The class immediately jumped into action to obey, as did Harry, only at a slower pace. He smiled. He had most definitely gotten the better of Snape on this one, and the best part was, Snape realized it.

The class passed without further incident, with the exception that he was developing a massive headache from Snape's constant attempts to enter his mind, but his shields never faltered.

Harry soon heard the bell ringing. Harry told Ron, Hermione, and Neville to go on without him. They nearly refused, but Harry assured him he'd meet them in the Common Room in a bit.

Soon, the room was empty, and it was just the two of them.

"Professor Snape." He said evenly

Snape turned on him. "If you know what's good for you, Potter, you'll get out of here now!"

"I'm sorry, sir. I can't do that."

"WHAT!?"

"Not yet. I have something for you."

"And just what might that be?" he growled

"This." Harry pulled out a single white envelope, with the word 'Severus' on it.

"I got into my parents vaults this summer, and they left several letters that I was supposed to deliver should anything happen to them. This one's for you. I believe it's from my mother, although it's magically sealed, so only you can open it."

The man was stunned.

"Oh, and my parents also told me to thank you for the warning."

Snape looked up. "What...warning?"

Harry knew he was playing dumb.

"The warning that Voldemort was coming after us. I know you took the prophecy to Voldemort..." the color drained from his potion's master face

“Yes, my parents told me about the prophecy too.” Answering Snape’s unasked question

“But you made up for it by warning my parents, and giving them the chance to go into hiding. I don’t blame you for Voldemort’s actions, nor for the death of my parents. So I thank you, again for your warning. Your life debt to my father is paid in full.”

With that final word, he placed the envelope on the table, gave a slight bow, and exited the room, before the dumbstruck potions master could find his tongue.

Everything he had just said was true. Snape had warned his parents. That was why Albus put so much trust in him, aside from his unwavering, yet extremely misguided faith that all people needed was a second chance.

Harry quickly made his way to the common room, where Ron was frantically waiting for him.

“What happened in there!? Why’d you stay?”

Harry shrugged it off. “I just had to deliver a letter?”

“Huh?”

Harry chuckled. “Don’t worry about it, Ron. Where’s Hermione and Neville?”

“Oh, they’re around here somewhere.”

“Let’s go find them, and go to dinner. I’m starving.”

Ron grinned at the thought of food, as Harry knew he would.

Snape’s POV

Meanwhile, in a dark part of the dungeon, an angry and very confused potions master sat stewing over the unusual events that had taken place in the last hour. He took a big swig of fire whisky,

before going back to the letter clutched tightly in his hand. The words echoing in his mind, haunting his thoughts.

He never imagined something like this would happen. In a way, nothing had changed. In another, everything had.

He read the words over and over again. A message from the grave. A message of thanks and forgiveness. One he had never expected. One he never desires...or at least...felt like he deserved. He had committed too many unforgivable acts throughout his lifetime, whether by choice or circumstance, all of which, he would have to live with the guilt of for the rest of his life. And now...now.

He shook his head, and took another drink.

His worst enemy had forgiven him. He wasn't sure how the boy knew how to do it, but after Harry had spoken the words that 'his debt was paid in full', he had bowed, and then magically sealed and closed the debt. In that moment, he literally felt as if a burden had been lifted from him. He knew that spell could only have worked if the one he was in debt to had truly forgiven and released him. He couldn't fathom James ever coming down to earth long enough to act civil, much less towards him.

And Lily...his precious Lily. His best friend since before 1st year. They had fallen apart in their 7th year, when she started dating James. It was later that year that he had succumbed to the pressure from Lucius Malfoy, and became a Death Eater. When Lily found out, she was livid! She had refused to see him or even speak to him ever again.

It hadn't been 'till after he had taken the prophecy to Voldemort, and realized just who he was targeting. Despite their falling out, and her marriage to James, he still truly cared for Lily, and was desperate to save her.

He thought back to the night he had gone to her and Dumbledore. He'd never forget the look of fear on her face as James held her tightly, and she clung desperately to that newborn baby.

Jealousy raged through him, even as he replayed the scene. That should have been him in that position. Holding her, comforting her, and it should have been his child in her arms!

But it wasn't. He had lost that chance over four years before that scene, when he had made the worst mistake of his life, and joined the Death Eaters. He hadn't seen her once in those four years, and only showed up to tell her that his 'master' wanted her and her family dead.

HOW COULD SHE FORGIVE THAT!? HOW COULD SHE THANK HIM FOR THAT!?

It had gotten her killed, murdered, yet she claimed to be grateful that Harry was alive.

The BOY. He was another mystery.

He was arrogant, much like his father, but...perhaps...not in the same way.

Aside from analyzing a potion theory no 7th year should have been able to...he was still convinced that someone had put him up to it, he just couldn't figure out who...he hadn't openly disrespected him in front of the class. He had obeyed all of the instructions, and had quietly taken notes.

Snape had expected him to be an exact copy of James Potter. Arrogant, disrespectful, rude. All around a total prat.

But this wasn't the case. He was level headed. Calm...to a degree. Nothing Snape did seemed to riel him.

And the scary part, he was an occulemens! How was that possible!? The kid was only 11!

Snape had several theories as to how that was possible, one in particular being the SCARIEST!!

He had NO IDEA what he would do if that were the case. He took another swig of whiskey.

SO...what was he supposed to do now?

He knew Albus would be extremely interested in this information. He also wasn't sure that was the best course of action at the moment. Besides, he knew the old man would be keeping an incredibly close eye on the boy anyway.

No. For now, he would keep this to himself. He would also watch the brat extremely closely, and then decide if other measures needed to be taken.

Okay, not a super long chapter, but I enjoyed writing this one. Let me know what you think, and if I stayed true to Snape's character.

Oh, and let me make one thing VERY clear, just in case any of you have doubts. NO, NO, NO!!! Harry is NOT Snape's son!!! Just wanted to make sure there was no confusion on that.

And if your curious about the potion or the ingredients, I did my research at The Hary Potter Lexicon on the web, at the Encyclopedia of Potions.

Thanks for reading, and thank you so much for all your reviews.

Midnight Star 25

A Glimpse

The first two weeks passed quickly. Harry didn't need as much of a refresher as he thought he would. His teachers were about as he remembered, with the exception of Snape. He was still the same dark, moody bat out of hell, as the first time around, but he didn't target Harry as much. Harry actually got the impression that Snape was doing everything possible to avoid him, although he would still try to trip up Harry in class, but this time, Harry anticipated all of his moves.

Potions was the one class, Harry decided, not to downplay his true abilities. In his other classes, he did the work, just not above first year level. In Snape's, he decided to do everything to perfection; for he knew that, no matter what, Snape would still find fault in his work, along with everyone else's who wasn't in Slytherin.

Snape kept trying to assault his mind, probably hoping his failed first attempt had been a fluke, but Harry's shields never faltered.

Harry spent his days in class, and working on his friendships. Ron was the easiest. Harry had missed him so much, and Ron was the same fun-loving guy, he always was.

Hermione was a little bit harder, but since Harry had been catching on to everything so quickly, Hermione had made it her goal to figure out just how just how he was doing it.

Neville was another story. Harry knew just how much courage his old friend truly had, and he was determined to pull it out of him much earlier than the first time around.

The twins hadn't approached him since the night of the banquet when they'd congratulated him on getting into Gryffindor, but Harry figured it was just a matter of time.

Yes, for the moment, he was enjoying being a kid again, at least during the day. At night, he dealt with his adult life. So far, everything was going smoothly at the Foundation. Fabian had a real head for business, and all of his Heads and Directors seemed to be quickly

acclimating into their positions. There had been a few snags, but nothing serious...yet.

Harry received nightly Owls from Fabian, and a weekly one from Griphook. Financially, everything looked good.

It was now the second weekend after school had started. Harry had just spent the last 3 hours playing, well getting thrashed, at wizard chess by Ron, which made Ron incredibly happy.

It was now mid-afternoon, and Harry was currently sitting cross legged on his bed, studying his map. Students were mostly outside, enjoying the last of the summer weather. There were a few kids roaming the halls, and Filch and Ms. Norris were on the 4th Floor. Snape was in his dungeons, and Albus was in his office. Good. He quickly pocketed the map, before pulling the curtains closed around his bed.

No one noticed when a tiny creature crept across the floor, into the common room, and out into the hall. The tiny red and black striped gecko crawled past the portraits, and into a dark, deserted corridor. A moment later, a pitch black vampire bat flew out of that corridor, leaving it the way he found it, empty.

The bat flew undetected to the 7th floor. Using its sonar, it confirmed that no one was around. A moment later, the bat was gone, and an 11-year-old wizard stood in its place.

Harry thought back to when he had first started his animagus training with Minerva during, what would have been, his 7th year. The first step had been meditation to find his form. The first couple of times he tried, all he could see was a big blur. Minerva told him that that was normal, but as meditating became easier, he realized that it wasn't a blur, but a...herd. It was a drove of animals; one after the other, as far as the eye could see. As much as he tried, he could never distinguish just one form. When he reported this to Minerva, she was disbelieving at first, but after joining him in meditation, and seeing what he did, she became ecstatic. She said that he was a Creber Animagus. Simply put, he had numerous forms, and could transform into almost any animal. It was beyond rare, and the last one had died in the

1300's. Harry slowly learned how to change from one form into the other. The one similarity he found in most of the animals was that their main color was black with green eyes. It was usually accompanied by other colors and markings, but those two features always held true.

Harry brought himself back to reality, and quickly walked in front of the tapestry three times. A door appeared, and he made his way into a small library with several plush arm chairs, and of course, a floo network. Harry closed the door then pulled out his wand. He muttered a series of locking charms, and security wards. Now the room would remain sealed 'till he returned.

Harry floored directly to Fabian's private office. He awkwardly stumbled out of the fireplace.

"Ugh, I hate traveling by floo."

A voice chuckled behind him. "Do you like any kind of magical travel?"

Harry grinned. "Only flying. Unfortunately the other forms are more convenient....So, how's everything going?"

Fabian leaned back in his chair. "Real good actually. The company's really starting to take off. I'm amazed it's happening this quickly though."

"Alright, how 'bout a breakdown?" Harry sat down, and Fabian pulled out a stack of folders.

"What first?"

"Muggles."

He picked up a folder, and handed it over.

"Well, my dear brother-in-law is quite adept when it comes to management. The safe house division, so far, has dealt with 8 children, two of which are squibs, and two, well that's a unique case,

which I'll get to in a moment." Harry raised a curious eyebrow, but didn't interrupt. "We've started those children in the school. Ms. Gherhart's even put in a petition to expand the school. Aside from teaching muggleborns about the wizarding world, she wants to teach the children who are squibs how to live in the muggle world."

"Really? I think it's a great idea."

Fabian smirked. "I figured you would. The authorization paperwork is in the folder. Just needs your signature."

Harry chuckled. "I think you're getting to know me too well"

"Yes, well the school's going well, although I did get the question as to when we were supposed to start approaching the students on the...uh...Hogwarts list."

Harry nodded. "I've thought about that too. I want to sit down with Arthur, Alicia, and Shelia before finalizing anything, and I'd like your opinion. I'm thinking about expanding the school, as well. We're already registered with the Ministry as a legal private school. We had to do that simply so the teachers could use magic, but we legally have as much right to teach magic as Hogwarts, Beauxbatons, or Durmstrang. I've looked into the laws regarding the teaching of magic, and there aren't any, as far as age is concerned. Most schools just start at 11, partly because they're boarding schools, and partly because they believe it would be too dangerous to teach a child any younger.

Fabian nodded. "I know the arguments. I take it you don't agree?"

"No, I don't. I believe that the younger a child starts to learn magic, the better control they have over it."

"Okay. So what did you have in mind?"

"Well, unlike the wizarding world, where the children are taught at home, these children go to muggle primary school. I have no desire to replace that, but I want our school to be something of an...after school program. Most kids enter the school system at the age of 5 for

Kindergarten. I think that would be about the right time to start approaching them. They're just getting old enough to start learning the basics, and the younger the child is taught, the better they retain the information."

Fabian was taken aback. "So, you want to open a school for children ages 5 to 10?"

"Just an after school program." Harry clarified "At least during the school year. That leads me to my next topic. I'd like that school to continue into the summer, just as day school or day camp for children ages 5 to 16. A lot of muggles send their kids to Summer camp or Summer day camps that specialize in different areas, whether it's music, sports, outdoor activities. Our specialty will just be magic. I want to use the farm we currently own, and expand on it. There can be a variety of magical and muggle classes spread throughout the day, so we still qualify to teach magic as a school, but we can also offer a variety of activities; fishing, horseback riding, nature walks, arts and crafts, muggle sports, such as basketball, football, and so on...along with all the magical stuff; flying lessons, and Quidditch."

"Are you sure this is legal!?"

Harry chuckled. "Perfectly."

Fabian shook his head. "Don't get me wrong. I think it's a great idea, but...well, this may sound...petty or biased, but what about the children in the magical world?"

"Well, who says I would bar them, but I'm afraid many would be leery or even hostile towards the idea, especially the pureblood fanatics, but no, I would never bar a child who truly desired to attend, or a parent who wanted to send their child."

Fabian didn't say anything for a minute. When he did, his words came slowly. "Harry, you are the most...unique...person I've ever met."

Harry looked puzzled. "I'm...not quite sure how to take that."

Fabian looked at him. "As a compliment. All you want to do is give, without any thought of yourself. I think the school and camp is a great idea, but the money and resources you want to pour into it...it's...it's completely unheard of...selfless even."

Harry shook his head. "Oh, you've got it all wrong. It's not selfless. Far from it. Everything I'm doing...all this...It's...repayment...restitution. I showed you a small part of what happened. Everyone died...for me. To make sure I could win the war. I was supposed to be the only casualty. I was supposed to be the only one to die! But it didn't happen that way. I can NEVER repay their sacrifice! But I can try to make this world a better place for them, even in a small way."

"Well, whatever you want to call it, it's remarkable."

Harry shook his head. "It's not. I've had the chance at fame and fortune. It never appealed. I never desired it. My life has taught me that people are the only things that make life worth living. As far as money goes...well...okay...what does our revenue look like so far?"

Fabian pulled out another folder. "I don't know how you knew, but if sales keep going like this, you'll be able to retire within 6 months!"

Harry laughed. "I could retire now with my family vaults alone. The money that's made here will go towards salaries, resources, and back into the community."

Fabian heaved. "See...selfless."

Harry rolled his eyes. "Oh, forget it...so, how are sales going?"

"Well, surprisingly, our strongest response has been within the Veela community. We can't seem to make enough of the anti-sensuating potion. Parents, especially, are buying it by the cauldron full for their children, especially the girls. Not all, but a great deal of the werewolf community is ready for the 'new and improved' wolfsbane, although Fenrir Greyback has been fighting that potion since it came out. Luckily for us, his opinion doesn't represent the majorities. The

Vampire Serum is starting to take off, but that may take a bit of time to establish a true bond of trust there.”

Harry ruffled through some papers. “I expected that. And the other areas?”

“Well, the growth and shrinking potions for the leprechauns and giants, respectively are faring well, although I think business might pick up around holidays and such, you know, to be able to go out into the community without causing a lot of unwanted attention.”

Harry nodded in understanding. “The Centaurs?”

“Eh, you know how suspicious they are of everyone, but when we told them we could special orders, we received an interesting response. Same thing with the Dragon Handlers. Apparently there’s several extremely difficult potions that require very rare or hard to find ingredients that many are willing to pay top dollar for.”

Harry looked surprised. “Hmm. I didn’t expect that.”

“Well, that’s a first.” Fabian scoffed

Harry just laughed. “Okay, well I guess that just leaves the trolls, although I don’t really expect much from them, except to keep the community from falling into Dark hands.”

“You’re right in that. Most trolls are too small minded to interact in our society.”

Harry snorted. “Oy, I remember.”

Fabian gave him a questioning look.

“Long story...well, it will be. Never mind. I’ll explain later. So, the research department’s keeping busy, at least in potions. How about the spell division?”

“Well, per your request, they’re focusing on improving defensive spells and shields. They also latched onto your idea to spell cloaks,

hats, ect with shield and protection charms. We should be ready to go into production within a month or so.”

“Excellent. That’s one area I do have plans for. Now, you alluded to an ‘interesting’ story.”

Fabian nodded. “Two of the children in our custody. A few nights ago, our ‘Dark Arts’ or ‘Auror’ Division received a tip of a planned werewolf attack, planned by...well, an underworld figure by the name of Marxton. He’s not a Death Eater, but he’s as bad as one, and he has connections with Greyback and his followers. Apparently one of Marxtons dealings went bad. As much as we can gather, this guy he put the hit out on tried to double cross him. Well, Marxton got wind of it, and decided to not only attack him, but his family as well. Our information was slightly faulty, and we didn’t get it in enough time to stop the attack. By the time our team got there...” Fabian sighed heavily. “...the parents were dead, and the two kids...well they were in pretty bad shape. We healed the physical wounds, but...”

Harry looked grim. “Let me guess, they were both bitten.”

Fabian nodded.

“That’s how Greyback works. Get ‘em young. Raise them up to his way of thinking. Well, we’ll keep them here for now, and start them on the wolfsbane at the next full moon. How old are they?”

“The boy’s 8 and the girls 10. She’s supposed to start Hogwarts next year.”

“Alright. See if they have any relatives willing to take them in, but if not, we need to work on finding a foster home that can deal with this type of situation, and I’ll deal with Albus next year when she starts Hogwarts.”

“Okay, so what do you want to do in the meantime?”

“Just...help them cope. They haven’t transformed yet, and with the wolfsbane, they’ll never have to face their ‘internal beast’, but it’ll still be a huge adjustment, plus once people find out, well they’ll need to

learn how to deal with that. Get Remus and Bailey Johnson to sit down with them at some point before the next full moon.”

Fabian nodded, and made a note on his computer before continuing.

“Oh, and how is everyone doing with the muggle equipment?”

Fabian grinned, “It’s...been interesting. Yesterday, one of the secretaries used the fax machine. Well, when it wouldn’t go through, she tried to fix it with magic, but instead of fixing it, it started sending off red and blue sparks, which in turn, set off the sprinkler system. Luckily, you had everything magically waterproofed, so nothing was ruined. It was actually pretty funny, but the team you hired is really helping.”

Harry chuckled. “Okay, anything else important?”

Fabian flipped through some files. “Nothing immediate.”

“How’s Remus doing?”

“Well, I think he misses you, but a certain lawyer has been a...frequent...visitor over the last two weeks.”

Harry grinned. “I felt like that might be the case. He didn’t come right out and say it in his letters, but the clues were there. And how about Arthur and Molly?”

“Well, like I said, Arthur has a real talent for management and leadership. He’s great with people, and is proving to be a very effective boss.”

“And Molly?”

Fabian smiled. “I think she’s truly enjoying herself. I’ve always kept an eye on her...from afar. I think she’s enjoying the opportunity to get out of the house.”

Harry nodded. “In my time, neither your sisters nor your brother-in-laws talents or true potential were ever realized, nor appreciated. The

Ministry held Arthur back, and Molly...she had...has so much to give. I hope to eventually promote her to the safe house division. I think she'd be amazing as one of our social workers. Now..." Harry switched topics. "...I have something I need you to do for me this week. What do you know about Frank and Alice Longbottom?"

Fabian looked surprised. "Well, I was already back in England when all that took place. Aren't they in a permanent ward at St. Mungos?"

Harry nodded. "Their son is my age, and was sorted into Gryffindor this year. He's fairly insecure, but I'm trying to befriend him earlier than I did last time. Anyway, I'd like to give him something that...I hope...will severely boost his confidence."

"What are you talking about?"

Harry chuckled. "Sorry. I need you to approach a woman by the name of Maria Roberts. She's the Head Healer of the Long-term Care Unit at St. Mungos. I want the Longbottoms to become...recipients...of a new potion our...labs developed."

Fabian looked confused for a minute, before realization crossed his face. "A CURE!? There's a cure for the Cruciatus!?"

Harry chuckled. "Well, more like a cure to reverse the effects of the Cruciatus, but yes. Something of a nerve regenerating potion. Unfortunately it won't be invented for another 12 years. I can't wait that long."

"So how are we going to convince them it works?"

Harry handed him several folders. "These are the 'results' of two different 'trials' conducted in the States. They show promising early results. As long as they don't look too closely into them, they shouldn't find any discrepancies."

Fabian was flipping through the folders. "So long does it take for the potion to work."

“Well, it varies. With minimal exposure, a single dose will reverse the effects almost instantly. In cases, such as the Longbottoms who have been in this condition for years, it takes about 6 months. 3 months to see initial results, and another 3 to, well...finish everything out.”

“6 Months! That’s IT?”

“Well, there will be therapy and such. These people have lost years on their lives, but yes, their minds will be completely restored.”

“Amazing. Who invented it, if I may ask?”

Harry grinned. “Take a guess?”

“YOU!?”

Harry fiercely shook his head. “No, I can brew potions. I have no time to invent them.”

“Snape?”

“No.”

Fabian thought for a moment. “Estaba. Henri Estaba.”

Harry nodded. “I told you he was a potions genius. Anyway, I’d like Neville to have his parents back by Christmas.”

Fabian shook his head. “Harry, I don’t think you’ll ever cease to amaze.”

Okay, I know it’s kind of a weird place to end, but this chapter was mostly about showing a glimpse of exactly what type of work the Foundation does, and how it makes it money. The next chapter will cover the first flying lessons. It should be up in a day or two.

Did you like Harry's animagus, uh...forms. I always thought it was too limiting for Harry to just have one or even two form. This is more fun to me. If you would like to see a specific animal, let me know, and I'll see if I can fit it in somewhere. Oh, and the term Creber simply means numerous in Latin. I was having a really hard time coming up with a creative term for that, so I decided to go with simplicity. Sorry if it doesn't make complete sense.

Thanks for reading.

Midnight Star 25

Renewing 'Old' Relationships

Harry spent the next two hours with Fabian before he flooed back to school, hoping he hadn't been missed. He was back in the ROR, and pulled out his map.

Good. Dumbledore was still in his office, Snape was still in the dungeons, and supper had just started. His friends were in the Great Hall, so he decided to join them.

He made his way to the Great Hall. He spotted Ron talking to Seamus. Neville was at the other end, talking with Hermione, Harry happily noted. Harry had really been working with on getting the three 1st years to interact together. He approached Neville and Hermione.

"Hey guys."

"Hey Harry." Replied Hermione

"Hey." chorused Neville

Harry sat down. "Enjoying the weekend?"

Neville shrugged. "There's really not much to do."

"WHAT?! Have you seen the library?!"

Harry chuckled. "There's more to life then the library, Mia."

Hermione gave him a questioning look. "What?"

"Huh?"

"What'd you call me?"

UH, Harry mentally kicked himself. He had been really careful not to use their nicknames. Those hadn't come 'till well after they'd truly become friends, after the troll attack on Halloween. That was another thing he would have to take care of.

He put on an embarrassed look. "Sorry. Just a nickname. Hermione's too long, but if you don't like it..."

Hermione shook her head. "No, I...like it. It just surprised me."

Harry smiled. "Didn't your friends have a nickname for you back home?"

Hermione went slightly red. "Umm, I didn't really, uh...not really."

At that moment, Ron came up. "Hey guys. Harry, I've been looking for you. Where'd you go after our game?"

Harry shrugged. "Just exploring the castle. Why were you looking for me?"

"Actually it was Fred and George. Something about borrowing something."

. "Oh, I think I know what they want."

"Care to share?"

Harry grinned mischievously. "I'll tell you three later. Too many people around."

Hermione looked worried. "It's not going to get you in trouble, is it?"

Harry smirked. "Only if you get caught."

"Harry..."

"Don't worry, Herm. Let's talk about something else. We've got our first flying lessons this week. Personally, I can't wait."

Hermione still looked worried. "I don't know." she said hesitantly "I don't like flying in an airplane, and I really don't like heights."

Harry gave her an encouraging smile. "Don't worry. You don't go nearly as high as an airplane, plus you control how high and fast you go."

A voice broke in. "What's an aplane?"

They looked over to Ron, before bursting out laughing. Ron's ears went red. Harry could tell he needed to reassure his friend.

"Sorry Ron. An airplane is a muggle form of transportation, used to travel long distances in a short amount of time, especially overseas. Instead of using a boat, and sailing across the ocean, they use an airplane, and fly over it. Most wizards use the Floo, port keys, or apparation. Honestly, I prefer muggle transportation over all of those. Flying's about the only type I do like."

Ron's eyes had gone big. "You mean you've actually apparated before!?" Hermione's eyes had gotten big too.

Harry could have kicked himself. "Uh...just side-along apparation with my uncle." he said quickly, which was perfectly true. Remus had taken him several times that Summer

"Oh, that's awesome! My brothers, Bill and Charlie can do it, but my dad says side-along's more dangerous, and should only be used in emergencies. So, what'd it feel like?!"

Harry just shrugged. "It wasn't that great. It felt like you were being squeezed through a tight tube."

Neville nodded. "It does. My Gran takes me all the time. Says it's the only dignified way to travel."

"Well, I've read you can splinch yourself when doing it." The three boys grimaced at the implied image. "That's why they make you get a license."

"Pe...lease Hermione. I'm trying to eat here." Ron groaned

Harry laughed. "Well, if it's all the same to you, I'll stick to flying."

“My Gran never let me fly. Afraid I would fall off, and break my neck.”

“Don’t worry, Nev. You’ll get the hang of it, and I’m sure Ron here can help you. I hear he’s a great flyer.”

Ron’s ears went red at the praise. “I’m okay.” he admitted, sheepishly.

Harry grinned. “I hear you’re better than okay. If you fly half as well as you play chess, then you’ll probably be the best one out there.”

Ron’s ears were now a bright crimson.

Harry smiled. He was slowly gaining his friends back. Just one step at a time.

First Flying Lessons

(Okay, this is going to look a bit like the scene from Nightmares of Future Past. I give the author to that complete credit for any parts that look similar. I guess I’m just not creative enough to get too original on this scene. Just thought I’d clarify that, before I got a dozen reviews on it.)

Wednesday, the day of their first flying lessons had finally arrived. Harry had something of a moral dilemma. This was what had secured his spot on the Gryffindor Quidditch Team, but at the expense of Neville getting hurt. He could just let events play out as in the original timeline, but was Quidditch that important? He loved the sport, even though he hadn’t truly played in years. He finally decided that it was more important to do right by his friends.

The four friends made their way outside with the rest of the Gryffindor and Slytherin 1st years. The first few minutes were just like before.

“Step up to the left side of your broomsticks and say ‘up’.”

“Just relax.” Harry whispered to Hermione and Neville

They both looked nervous, but nodded.

They both did much better then the first time. Hooch had them hover and touch back down several times.

Just when Harry thought everything was going well, something suddenly caught his eye.

Draco, who currently wore a bored expression, had just pulled out his wand, and was muttering something.

Harry didn't catch the spell, but, before he could do anything, he saw the effects.

Lavender Brown, who had been hovering, suddenly had her broom jerk violently; quickly rise several feet in the air, before spinning, and throwing her hard to the ground, knocking her unconscious.

The crowd let out a collective gasp, before surrounding the unconscious form.

"BACK, BACK!" Hooch ordered

Harry tried to reach the unconscious girl, but Hooch stopped him. She quickly conjured a stretcher, and levitated Lavender onto it.

"If I see a single broom in the air, the one riding it will be out of here before they can say Quittich!" and with a turn, quickly levitated the stretcher towards the school

Harry was angry! Draco was bending down where Lavender had fallen.

"MALFOY!" The whole group, including Draco, turned at this outburst.

"You JINXED her on purpose!" Harry raged

A flicker of fear flashed in his eyes, before reverting back to a smirk.

"You can't prove anything, Potter." he drawled

“Oh, I can!” Harry retorted “But I don’t have to.”

“Or, perhaps, because you can’t! You didn’t see anything.”

“Or, maybe it’s that you didn’t see enough.”

Draco didn’t seem to catch the reference. “I don’t know what you’re talking about, Potter. All I saw was one of you Gryffindorks losing control of their broom, and falling off. Maybe if she hadn’t been so superstitious, and focusing so much on this good luck charm, instead of her actual flying, maybe she wouldn’t have fallen off.”

In his hand, he was holding a small round pendent.

“Hand it over, Malfoy!” Harry demanded

“What are you going to do if I don’t?” Draco smirked, and before anyone could do anything, he jumped on his broom, and kicked off.

“You’re all talk, Potter. You don’t have the guts to come play with the big boys.”

All Harry could see was red. If he had even stopped for a moment, he would have realized just how stupid it was to get riled up, especially by Draco, of all people.

Without thinking, and ignoring a warning by Hermione, he hopped onto his broom, and flew up to Draco’s level.

“Ohh Potter, is she your little girlfriend?” Draco taunted

“Keep talking, Draco, but remember that you don’t have your bodyguards up here to protect you.”

Draco looked around, and seemed to realize the truth of these words.

“Fine! You want this? You can have it!”

The next few minutes passed in a blur.

Draco threw the amulet, and in a spectacular dive, Harry caught it.

Just like before, Professor McGonagall came storming out, and called him over.

Just as before, Wood was beyond ecstatic, and once again, Harry became the youngest Seeker in a century.

But now, he was worried. He had tried to change events, and he had. He had stopped Neville from getting hurt, but now another classmate had been harmed, how severely, he wasn't sure.

Were some things inevitable? The Hat had told him that he was messing with fate itself. Would he really be able to change the future?

He believed that he had already proved that things could change, simply by his actions over the last 6 weeks, but would it truly make a difference? In the end?

He was determined to do everything in his power to make sure it did!

A bit later

SEEKER! But 1st years NEVER make the house team!" Ron was beyond excited

"You've got to be the youngest player in, I don't know, a century!" added Neville, equally excited

"You really shouldn't have done that Harry, but at least you didn't get expelled, and Lavender is going to be okay."

Harry knew that was Hermione's way of saying 'congratulations'.

Harry smiled. "Thanks guys."

At that moment, twin red heads appeared.

"Congratulations Harry."

“Wood’s just told us.”

“Fred and George are on the team, too. Beaters.”

“Yeah, I hear ya’ll are pretty good at it.” Harry said casually

‘Pretty’

‘good?’

‘We’re’

‘insulted.’

“We’re’

‘the best.’

Harry laughed. “I guess we’ll see.”

“Oh, did Ronnykins give you our message?”

Harry grinned. “Yeah, he did. And whatever you’re planning, I want in.”

The twins looked surprised.

‘I’m’

‘not sure’

‘that’s the...’

Harry stopped them.

“I’ve already proven that I’ve inherited by dad’s Quiddich abilities. Now, let me prove I’ve inherited some of his other skills. That...uh...reading material...was only from 1st year. You should see some of the 7th year material.”

The twins' eyes lit up. They looked at each other, then back at Harry.

"DEAL!" they said together

'We'll let you know'

'When and where.'

And without another word, they were gone.

"What in the world was that all about?" Hermione demanded

Harry just smirked. "You'll have to wait and see, Mia. You'll have to wait and see."

Okay, I know that this isn't the long chapter you were hoping for, but the next one will be.

Thanks for reading.

Midnight Star 25

1st Problems

It was mid Thursday, and the 1st year Gryffindors' were sitting in History class, listening to Binns drone on about the Goblin rebellions. All of a sudden, Harry felt the pocket of his robes heat up.

Harry discretely pulled out a small role of parchment, and read the message that slowly appeared on it. It read...

H,

We ran into a snag. MR reviewed the 'results', and has approved the trial, but the one with power of attorney refuses to give the go ahead, and nothing I say is changing her mind.

What is our next course of action?

F

Harry reread the letter. MR was Maria Roberts. The power of attorney was Neville's grandmother, Augusta Longbottom. Harry had been afraid she might try and stop this. He made up his mind.

F,

I'll come talk to her personally. Set up a meeting for tomorrow at 9 a.m. at St. Mungo's. I'll meet you in your office tomorrow at 8:30. Let me know if any of this needs to be changed.

H

The message absorbed into the parchment, and disappeared. A moment later, he received the message back.

‘Okay, let me see what I can do.’

Later that night, Harry got confirmation that the meeting was set. The next morning, he downed half a pill that mimicked the symptoms of the common cold; flushed cheeks, watery eyes, and sneezing. It had been one of the twins later inventions they had deemed common cold chocolate. Harry complained of a cold and a headache. It was more than enough to convince Ron and Neville. He said he just needed some sleep, and alluded that he might go down to the hospital wing to get a potion from Madame Pomfrey.

After everyone had left, he downed the antidote, and pulled out his map. Only a few older students were in the Common Room. Harry wished he had his invisibility cloak. He hoped Albus would still give it to him at Christmas. If not, he would be going directly to him.

Harry used a Disillusionment Charm on himself, and quickly made his way through the castle. He sealed the ROR, and flooed to Fabian’s office.

“So, are we ready to face the fire?”

Fabian groaned. “I’ve already faced it. It’s your turn now.”

Harry chuckled. “Anything I need to deal with before we leave?”

“Nothing that can’t wait.”

The two men flooed to St. Mungos, and Fabian led the way to the Long-term Care Ward, and entered one of the offices.

“Good Morning, Staci.” Fabian greeted.

“Mr. Lawson. One moment, I’ll let Mrs. Roberts know you’re here.”

She disappeared through a door, and reappeared a moment later.
“Mrs. Roberts will see you now.”

The two men entered the office, and were greeted by a woman, whom Harry knew to be in her mid 60's, but appeared no older than her late 30's. She was the wife of Mark Roberts, one of the most successful business men in the greater part of Europe, dealing mostly with construction and architecture.

“Mr. Lawson, please come in.”

“Mrs. Roberts, allow me to introduce Jacob Myers, the president and CEO of the ‘Unity Foundation’.”

“A pleasure, Mrs. Roberts.” Harry greeted, shaking her hand.

The pleasure is mine, Mr. Myers. Please, both of you take a seat.”

“Thank you.” Harry replied, as the three of them sat.

“I must say, when Mr. Lawson first approached me, I was a bit more then skeptical, but after looking at some of the test results this could be one of the biggest medical breakthroughs in years.”

Harry gave her a smile. “I truly hope so, Mrs. Roberts. We have high hopes for this potion.”

“Where exactly was this potion developed? Mr. Lawson was unable to say.”

“Uh, this potion actually originated in the States, but has been worked on by multiple groups, in countries all over the world, over a period of many years.”

“Really? And how is that possible?”

“Well, we have many...‘sister’...organizations, in a sense, all over the world. One of our main franchises is Potions Research, Development, and Distribution. We supply the wizarding world with potions that are

not readily available through...traditional...means, as well as the creation of potions, and the improvement of others.”

“And how come I’ve never heard of...’The Mark of Unity Foundation’?”

“The ‘Unity Foundation’ is the newest branch within the organization. We opened our doors a little less than a month ago.”

At that moment, a knock on the door interrupted them.

“Mrs. Roberts, Mrs. Longbottom is here.”

“Thank you, Staci. Send her in.”

A moment later, the distinguished Augusta Longbottom entered the room. She looked much like Harry remembered from his 5th year.

“Augusta, thank you for coming.”

“Maria. You said it was important.” She stated, shortly, as she sat down in one of the armchairs.

Okay...a bit colder than Harry remembered.

“I believe it is.”

“Nice to see you again, Mrs. Longbottom.” Fabian greeted

“Mr. Lawson, I thought I made it clear, we had nothing further to discuss.” Her voice was cold with a hint of finality

This was worse than Harry thought.

“Madame Longbottom, I sincerely apologize if Mr. Lawson has done or said anything to offend you in any way. He has a bad habit of shooting off his mouth before thinking.”

Fabian sent Harry a look...well...if looks could kill, Harry would have just lost one of his 9 lives. On the other hand, Harry swore he saw a faint smile on the older woman's face, but just as quickly, it was gone.

"And just who might you be?" she asked bluntly

Harry smiled. "Forgive me. My name is Jacob Myers; CEO of the 'Unity Foundation'."

"Is that supposed to impress me, Mr. Myers?"

"Not at all, Madame. Just an explanation as to why I'm here."

"You're here to try and convince me to turn my son and his wife into your 'guinea pigs'!" her voice was hard, and accusing

Harry shook his head sadly. "I'm truly sorry if that was your conclusion to our offer. I assure you, those are far from our intentions. We have nothing but respect for you and your family, and for the high price you've all paid. We'd just like to try and give you back some of what you've lost."

"And this...potion...will do that?" her voice holding a great deal of sarcasm

"Yes." Harry said simply

"Tell me, Mr. Myers, are you a Potions Master?"

Harry smiled. "As a matter-of-fact, I am."

Augusta looked taken aback, but quickly recovered. "And have you been over this potion?"

"Very thoroughly."

Her face held a hint of surprise.

"Then explain to me just what it would do to my son." Her voice was smooth and aristocratic

(A/N: Everything you're about to read is purely out of my imagination. I have no prior medical knowledge about any of this. Just thought I'd warn ya.)

"Very well. For starters, let me say that I've thoroughly been over your son and daughter-in-laws files, so I do know their case. Very simply put, the human mind is an incredibly delicate instrument. Even a simple bump on the head can cause something as severe as amnesia. In your family's case, their minds were assaulted like...no ones ever should be."

"Think of the mind as a...very...very thin...very delicate piece of glass. Now, that glass can only take so much before it breaks. Your son and his wife were under such a severe attack for such a horrendous amount of time, the glass couldn't withstand it, and shattered into millions of tiny pieces, so small that they couldn't put themselves back together."

"Now, our potion, over time, is designed to go into the mind, find all those pieces, and carefully reconstruct them, until the glass was just as it was before."

"You're saying that it will completely restore their minds?"

Harry nodded. "Minds, memories, motor skills, everything."

"And just what are the chances of it working?"

"About 85/15, in favor of positive results."

"And the 15 percent?" her voice was accusing

"Those cases were mostly patients who were born with a birth defect. We hoped it would work the same way in them, but...we were mistaken. This potion is specifically designed to reverse the effects of the Cruciatus, nothing else."

"And what are the risks?"

“Well, with any major potion, there have been some initial side effects, but nothing long term. Headaches, nausea, vomiting, occasional high fevers, but we’ve actually found that that means the potions working.”

“And if it doesn’t?”

“Worst case scenario; there’s no change in their condition, and they stay in the same state as they are now.”

“You expect me to believe that either this potion works or it doesn’t?”

Harry nodded. “That’s what I’m saying.”

“So how long would this miracle cure take?” her voice held sarcasm and disbelief

“Since your family is such an extreme case, about 3 to 6 months. 3 months to see initial results, then another 3 for complete recovery.”

Now her face held certain disbelief. “Six months. My son has been in this condition nearly ten years, and you’re saying you can cure them in six months?! Forgive me if I seem skeptical!” her voice was hard again

Harry sighed. “Madame Longbottom...I realize how many...‘cures’...you’ve tried in the past, and the number of disappointments you’ve faced when they’ve failed. I understand that you believe you’re just setting yourself up for another disappointment....All I’m asking is one chance. Give the potion 3 months. If...at the end of those three months, the beginning of the new year, there are no visible results, I’ll respect your wishes, and discontinue the treatment. But, if there are results that the potions working, you let us continue for an additional three months, then reevaluate their condition.”

There was a moment of silence, while she seemed to process his words. When she finally spoke, her words came slowly.

“Three months? That’s all you’re asking?”

Harry nodded.

“And at the end of that time, when there’s no results, you’ll leave my family alone?”

Harry sighed. “If that’s the case...then yes.”

Augusta closed her eyes, and rubbed her forehead. The tension stretched out, before she spoke again.

“Alright Mr. Myers. You have until the first of the year. But I warn you, I don’t want a word of this leaked out to my grandson or the press.”

“Thank you. I assure you, nothing will be leaked out on our end, but Mrs. Roberts, I suggest you give the same warning to your staff.”

“I’ll take care of it, Mr. Myers. Not to worry, Augusta. We’ll treat this with the utmost discretion.”

Augusta nodded shortly.

“If you could, Mrs. Longbottom, we just need your signature on these forms.”

For the next half hour, they spent signing forms, and answering a few final questions. Once everything was legal, Harry respectfully bowed his head.

“Thank you for this chance. You won’t be disappointed.”

She gave him a look. “I guess we’ll see.” she said shortly. “Good day, Maria. .” and with that, she was gone.

The group seemed to let out a collective breath.

“Well, I congratulate you, Mr. Myers. Very few people have ever gotten Augusta Longbottom to change her mind, once she’s made it up. I just hope the treatment works as well, and as quickly as you claim. Otherwise, you’ll have made a very dangerous enemy.”

Harry nodded. "I appreciate your concern, Mrs. Roberts. I have no intention of becoming the focal point of Augusta Longbottom's wrath."

Harry reached into his robes, and pulled out a box. He drew his wand, and muttered an enlarging charm, and placed the box on the desk.

"This is enough potion to last a week, for the both of them. There's details for dosage instructions, and dosage times in the box. You'll personally receive a box by owl each week. If you have any questions or any complications arise, please direct your owls to Mr. Lawson. I'm often out of the country, and the owls will reach him faster."

"Thank you, Mr. Myers, and to you, Mr. Lawson. We'll get the treatment started immediately."

Fabian and Harry thanked her for her time, bid her good day, then flooded back to the Foundation.

"Fabian, you could have warned me just how bad the situation was!"

Fabian smirked. "I had...complete...confidence in your ability to handle it."

Harry rolled his eyes. "Thanks." He said sarcastically. "Just what I need. More expectations."

"Yes, I heard you made the House Team. Congratulations."

"Thanks, but who'd you hear it from? Remus?"

Fabian nodded. "Him and Arthur. Apparently my nephew is pretty excited about your new status."

Harry chuckled. "Only Quidditch could get Ron to write a letter home." Then Harry's expression changed. "But this has got me worried, Fabian."

"What? Becoming Seeker?"

Harry spent the next few minutes explaining how events had played out the first time, and how he had tried to change things.

“I’m just wondering if I can truly make a difference.”

“Harry...I don’t believe that history’s written in stone. To me, you’ve already proven that. If someone had told me a year ago, that I’d be working for an 11-year-old, much less Harry Potter, the Boy-Who-Lived, I would have sent them straight to St. Mungos.” Harry looked like he was about to interrupt, but Fabian stopped him. “This did NOT happen in your time. Nor did my, uh...miraculous...return.”

Harry was startled, then grinned. “So, you’ve finally come to your senses.”

“Brat.”

“Hey, just cause I’m in this body...”

Fabian smirked.

“So, picked out a date.”

“Christmas.”

Harry and Fabian talked for a few more minutes, before he flooed back to Hogwarts. He hoped he hadn’t been missed yet. He pulled out his map. Good, his friends were still in class.

He quickly reverted back to 11, disillusioned himself, and snuck back into his room. He decided that after that ordeal, he really did have that headache, and needed some sleep. He spelled the curtains, reinforced his shields, and fell into a deep, dreamless sleep.

The next day was Saturday. Harry had successfully avoided the Great Hall since the incident on Wednesday, by making friends with a couple of the House Elves, and having his meals delivered to his

room, but now he found himself being double teamed by Ron and Hermione to come eat breakfast with them.

Hermione was worried that he was sleeping too much, and Ron just wanted him up. Neville just stood back, and watched. Harry finally gave in, and allowed the three of them to lead him to the Great Hall. As they entered, they were met with a blonde-headed sneer.

"Haven't seen you in a while, Potter." came the sarcastic tone. "Here to have a last meal?"

"Shove off, Malfoy." demanded Ron

"Ooh, are you having the Weasel defend you now."

"Can it, Draco! You're just mad because I'm better at flying than you are." Harry taunted (He knew it was childish, but hey, that's what he was supposed to be, a kid)

"In your dreams, Potter."

"Yeah, there too." Harry retorted

Ron let out a chuckle.

Draco was livid.

"So, you think you're better than me?! I challenge you! A Wizards duel!"

Harry was amused at Draco's stupidity, but decided to play along.

"Any time, any place."

Draco smirked. "Tonight. The trophy room. Midnight."

Harry tilted his head. "Wouldn't that make it tomorrow?"

Draco growled. "Just be there!" Then stormed away, with Crabbe and Goyle hot on his heels.

Harry chuckled, as he moved to sit down at the Gryffindor table.

“Harry...you’re not really going to go there tonight...are you?”
Hermione asked, worriedly

“Of course he is, Hermione. He has to.”

“Don’t worry, Mia. I’m not going to do anything stupid. I know it’s a trap.”

Hermione looked slightly relieved.

“So, what are you going to do, Harry?” questioned Neville

“Ignore him...”

“WHAT?!”

“...FOR NOW.” Harry continued “Draco Malfoy is nothing but a bully who considers himself superior because of his pureblood family name, and financial status. One day, he’s going to wake up, and be forced to face a harsh reality. Ron, there are times when you have to face bullies, but not when it’s an obvious trap! If he keeps insisting on a confrontation, I’ll deal with him then.”

Ron looked confused, but let the issue rest for the moment.

During the mail that morning, Harry received his new broom. He knew he wasn’t supposed to open it at the table. He quickly glanced at the note, then handed it over to Ron.

Ron’s eyes lit up, and quickly passed the note to Neville, who’s face contorted to a similar expression. Before he knew it, Ron was dragging him and the box towards the stairs. Just like before, Draco stopped them, and grabbed the box.

“Hey! This is a broom! You’re in trouble now, Potter! Professor Flitwick, Professor Flitwick! Harry’s trying to sneak a broom into school!”

“Ah, yes. I heard about your special circumstances. What kind is it?”

Harry grinned. “A Nimbus Two Thousand, sir. And it’s really thanks to Draco here that I got it.”

And before Draco could work out what had just happened, Harry scampered up the stairs, followed closely by his 3 friends.

Later that evening, Harry was discretely approached by Fred and George.

“Hey Harry.”

“Ready to cause a little mischief?”

“What’d you have in mind?”

‘Well’

‘We think’

‘Snape’s classroom’

‘could use’

‘a little’

‘livening up.’

Harry grinned. “I couldn’t agree more, but I’ve got a better idea. You guys know how to get into the kitchens, right?”

They looked at each other. “Of course.”

“Alright, well here’s what I have in mind.”

After a few moments, the twins eyes were dancing with glee.

“Harry, this is genius! You really did inherit your dad’s abilities.”

Harry chuckled. "Alright, well let's plan on meeting tomorrow night. If we're lucky, we'll have an extra-long weekend."

At midnight, a black cat could be seen creeping out of the Gryffindor common room, but the few students who were still awake paid no attention. The emerald eyes cut through the darkness. If this time were anything like his original timeline, Draco wouldn't show up, but things were slightly different, and Harry wanted to honestly say that he had been there, at least to Malfoy.

As he silently entered the trophy room, he was surprised to actually see Draco standing in the corner, along with Crabbe and Goyle, whispering in hushed tones. Harry decided to have a little fun. He moved into the shadows, closed his eyes, and concentrated on his features. A moment later, a duplicate Mrs. Norris crept over to the three boys, and meowed loudly.

"Hey, it's Filches stupid cat." came a harsh whisper

"Shoo. Go on!" ordered Draco

"I heard Filch is always right behind that possessed cat. We'd better get out of here." whispered Crabbe, a bit of fear in his voice

"Oh shut up, Crabbe! Just hex the stupid thing!" Malfoy bit out

The cat let out an angry hiss, and before any of the boys could do anything, it ran into one of the suits of armor, knocking it down, causing a loud 'BANG', 'CLANG', and 'CRASH'.

Suddenly Filches voice could be heard from around the corner. 'What's going on over here?!'

"Run!" Draco hissed

The three boys disappeared out the back door to the trophy room, just as Filch rounded the corner, but not before he caught sight of them.

“HEY YOU BRATS, STOP!” he demanded, as he took pursuit.

He never noticed the duplicate to his precious pet, as the cat disappeared in the opposite direction, wearing a very satisfied smirk.

Okay, I know this didn't advance the story very far, but it leads into the fun events of the next chapter. It shouldn't take me too long to get it up. Let me know what you think. Your reviews are a real motivation to get the next chapter up even faster. Thanks for reading.

Midnight Star 25

First Strike

Harry was a bit disappointed to find out that Filch hadn't been quick enough to catch the three Slytherins, but he decided not to dwell on it. He knew that their time would come. It was just a matter of patience.

Monday morning started out just like any other school day. But right before breakfast was over, Harry cast a silent activation spell.

Before anyone could figure out what happened...chaos ensued!

The Great Hall went deathly still...before erupting into fits of laughter.

Any student who had eaten the blueberry muffin, which was about half of the student population, had suddenly been transfigured into either Professor Dumbledore, Professor McGonagall, or Professor Snape, complete with long white beards, tight hair buns, or slick black hair.

Even Fred and George had decided to make themselves 'victims' of the prank, although Harry didn't. The twins knew they'd be suspected, but they didn't think Harry would.

The laughter continued. It took several loud bangs from Professor Dumbledore's wand to regain a temporary order.

"Now" Dumbledore started, calmly. "I'd like the responsible party to step up NOW!"

No one stepped forward.

Even though his voice was stern, Harry could tell that he was truly amused, and trying to hide a smile.

"Very well, until the guilty part is caught, unaffected students are confined to their Common Rooms..."

A groan echoed through the Hall.

“Those students effected, please come forward, and we’ll work on reversing the effects.”

But before anyone could move, a HUGE show of Fireworks erupted above the Teacher’s table. In alternating red, gold, silver, and green letters, a message could be seen. It read...

THANK YOU FOR PARTICIPATING IN OUR PRANK!

THIS IS JUST THE FIRST STRIKE!

A NEW ERA HAS BEGUN!

BEWARE!

-THE GOLDEN VIPERS

The Hall was suddenly raining with confetti, and a colorful array of wizard hats with gold stars that strangely resembled the type the Headmaster could often be seen wearing.

Harry looked over at Snape. He was LIVID, and glaring in the direction of the Weasley’s, although he couldn’t find them, considering they were currently transformed.

Even Percy and Ron, who was sitting next to him, had been affected.

Snape met Harry’s eyes for just a minute. Harry gave him a slight smirk. He saw him raise an eyebrow. Apparently he didn’t believe a 1st year could have anything to do with this.

Harry knew that he wouldn’t be able to prove anything, even if he did accuse him. Harry had used wandless magic for the activation spell, although he did ‘forget’ to mention that little detail to the twins.

A cry from Ron broke his concentration, and the other part of the prank kicked in.

“Atwhay ethay OODYBLAY ELLHAY isway oinggay onway?” Ron screeched

“ONALDRAY, atchway ouryay anguagelay!” Hermione repremended

It took everything Harry had to keep a semi-cool façade, but he couldn't hide an amused smile. Neville, on the other hand, who hadn't been affected, wasn't even trying to hide his amusement. He burst into a fit of laughter, and kept pointing to the reflection in the goblet, which was what caused Ron's outburst, and brought about even more laughter as more and more people discovered the second part of the prank.

The ones who had been affected were temporarily charmed to understand the pig latin the others were spewing, whether or not you'd ever used it before. Harry understood it, perfectly.

Ron was currently transfigured into a shorter version of Dumbledore.

“ERMIONEHAY OOKLAY ATWAY OURYAY ERLECTIONRAY!
OU'REYAY ONAGALLMCGAY!”

Hermione immediately picked up her glass, and let out a small gasp.

Harry couldn't help, but let out a small chuckle.

“Don't worry, Mia. I think it looks good. Just look at Fred and George, pointing to where the twins had just been sitting. In their place sat a couple of twin Snapes, wearing identical pink hats with yellow stars.

Without warning, there was a cry of 'WEASLEY'!

Snape was LIVID!

The twins gave Harry a smirk, before joining the others who had been affected.”

“Guys, you'd better go, but hey, wear these.” He said to Ron and Hermione, before handing Hermione a royal purple hat with gold stars, and Ron a dark blue one with the same star pattern.

Ron's temper was starting to boil.

“Enwhay lway...Ymay othersbray...l'mway oinggay otay illkay...” he sputtered angrily

Hermione just kept quiet.

“See you guys later.” Harry grinned, as several teachers were ordering students back to their Common Rooms.

“Come on, Nev.” Harry motioned to his friend

Neville was still rolling with laughter, earning glares from those around him who had been affected.

By the time they had been ‘escorted’ back to the Common Room, Neville had finally calmed down.

“THAT...was BLOODY BRILLIANT! I wonder who the Golden Vipers are.”

A few of the other students around him nodded their heads in agreement. They were wondering the same thing.

Harry smiled, but just shrugged. He hadn’t been a prankster the first time around, and he wasn’t ready to reveal himself as one yet.

Later that morning, Remus was sitting in his office going through some files. The response from the Magical Communities had far surpassed his expectations. His job was difficult, and constantly kept him on his toes. It required a great deal of time and patience, but in truth, he enjoyed it.

He’d used his connections to the Werewolf Community, and was slowly gaining the Leaders trust. Greyback and his followers were still a problem, but hey, one dilemma at a time.

Vulcan was the main leader of the Vampire Community, and had kept the Vampires neutral and somewhat peaceful for the last 400 years or

so. Remus and Bailey had a surprisingly easy time in meeting with Vulcan and his inner circle. Apparently Vampires have an easy time in telling when someone is sincere, and, on top of that, they consider 'most' werewolves as natural allies. Remus had a sneaking suspicion that his absent boss had known this when hiring him.

The other community relations were going well, with the exception of the trolls, but Mr. Lawson had told him not to worry about that.

It was a huge adjustment, being the one in charge, but he was slowly earning the reputation of being a fair but strict boss. Remus knew that even one remark or mistake on his or his employees part could easily destroy the trust they and the Foundation was working so hard to build.

Obviously, there were parts of the job that weren't pleasant. He had just received a file on two children who had been bitten on the previous full moon.

He had, of course, been out of commission that night, but with this new version of the wolfsbane, his fevers were down, he was nowhere near exhausted as he usually was, and the pain during the actual transformation was now minimal. Because he kept his mind, he no longer woke up with self inflicted bites and wounds. He was only missing a single day of work, and he no longer felt like a threat to himself or those around him.

He felt better about having guardianship of Harry, too. He missed his nephew. He had had so little time with him before he had left, plus finding out that Sirius was innocent. But Harry had been surprisingly consistent about to him, at least weekly, if not more.

And Karin was working hard on Sirius' case.

Karin. She was another surprise. He had finally worked up the courage to officially ask her out, and to his surprise, she'd said 'yes'. That had been almost 3 weeks ago, and now they'd gone out several times, and she was a frequent visitor at his work, and several times, she had been working late, and Remus had bought her supper.

He was gaining a good reputation among his staff and co-workers, and he was starting to make some friends, one of them being Arthur, finding common ground in their Head positions, and, more importantly, their kids at Hogwarts. Remus had requested that he and Molly not spread it around just 'who' his nephew was, and they had respectfully complied.

Remus' thoughts were interrupted by a tapping on the window. He opened the window, and immediately recognized his nephew's Snowy owl. He relieved her of her burden, and then pointed to the owl perch, that were installed in all of the offices for the numerous owls that came and went throughout the week. Hedwig hooted before flying over, and Remus unrolled the letter.

What he read made him laugh. It read...

Hey Uncle Mooney,

How's your day going? You'll never guess how mine just started! Someone tried to pull a prank on the whole school! At least it looked that way. About half the school was affected. I wasn't affected and neither was Neville, but Ron and Hermione were. Okay, getting off track.

Anyway, we were all sitting in the Great Hall for breakfast, then right before it was over, people started changing! Can you guess into who? Well, it varied. It was either...are you ready for this...Professor Dumbledore, Professor McGonagall, or Professor Snape! Can you believe that?! Oh, and get this. Those affected could only speak pig latin! Do you know how hard that is to understand?!

But hey, it was HILARIOUS! Neville couldn't stop laughing. Ron was upset. He seemed to think Fred and George had pulled this. Apparently Snape did too, cause he screamed out 'WEASLEY' through the whole Hall. But the thing is, they were affected too. They were turned into a couple of twin Snapes, while Ron was Dumbledore, and Hermione was McGonagall. The twins did look like they were having fun, but so did a lot of other kids. Some of them even tried to sneak out of the Great Hall. I guess they didn't want the teachers to remove the charms.

Anyway, after people had changed, a huge display of fireworks erupted over the teachers table, with a message 'thanking' everyone for participating in the prank, then warned that this was just the 'first strike', and that a 'new era' had begun. It was signed the 'Golden Vipers'. No one seems to know who they are, but if I had my guess, I'd say they're trying to rival the Marauders.

The only downside to this prank is that we're confined to our Common Rooms, while the teachers try to reverse the effects. Well, I've got to go. Neville talked me into a game of Exploding Snap, and well...I'm not concentrating very well. Okay...I'm getting beat like I stole something.

Well, I'll write to you soon, and let you know how long it takes the teachers to figure out how to reverse it.

TTYL,

Harry

P.S. Don't tell me you think I had something to do with this, just cause of March 15, 1974 (innocent look)

As Remus read this last line, he was gobsmacked. His nephew has pulled THIS kind of prank off, or at least had some hand in it? Harry had hinted that the Weasley twins possibly had something to do with it. Arthur had mentioned that they were the pranksters of the family.

Well, at least no one had been hurt, and he could just imagine the look on Snape's face. The more he thought about it, the funnier it became.

He thought back to March 15, 1974. The Marauder's prank hadn't been quite the same, but similar. The 4 of them had managed to jinx the apple turnovers during breakfast. Right before the end of it, everyone who had eaten one had suddenly had their head transfigured into either a cat or a dog, and all the people with cat's heads could do was bark, and the one's with dog's head's could only 'meow'. It had taken the teacher's over 12 hours to figure out how to

reverse the effects, a record at the time, one that James had been incredibly proud of, considering they were only 3rd years at the time.

Remus could just imagine the proud looks on James' and Sirius' faces if Harry had truly helped pull off this kind of prank in his 1st YEAR! Which Remus highly suspected was the case.

He quickly wrote a response to his nephew. Despite him not wanting Harry to get into trouble, the prank had been harmless, and obviously hilarious. He even liked the new name. 'The Golden Vipers'. It was creative, and it threw suspicion on more than one House. He would have to ask just 'who' came up with the name. He sat down, and began writing.

The day passed slowly. Neville, eventually, became bored with 'exploding snap', and wandered off to find out the latest word on the progress of the teachers. It had been over 3 hours, and the teachers still hadn't figured out how to remove it. Harry knew they wouldn't be able to either, not even Albus. The activation spell could only be overridden by the caster (him), or it would just wear off in 12 hours, whichever came first, and Harry planned to milk this for all it was worth.

Professor McGonagall had just come to announce that the students would be allowed out for lunch, and then classes would be canceled for the rest of the day. The teachers were making no headway on the prank, and all the pig latin was really grating on the teacher's nerves.

This announcement brought a round of cheers throughout the Common Room. The tight-lipped transfiguration teacher frowned, then went into lecture mode.

"If I find out that ANY GRYFFINDOR had something to do with this prank, there WILL be severe consequences for the ones responsible!" With that, and a swish of her robes, she was gone.

Harry decided that since they had the rest of the day off, today would be the perfect time to finish up one little piece of business. He picked

up several things from his trunk, before making his way to the Great Hall.

He ate a quick lunch, and as a couple of students started leaving, Harry quickly followed. He went up the stairs, but stopped on the 2nd floor, and ducked into a dark corridor. Making sure no one was around, he pulled out his map and made sure the way was clear.

Good. Myrtle was currently haunting the Prefects bathroom.

He walked up to the sink, and hissed 'open'. The sink slid open. Harry used several 'scroungify' and cleaning charms on the slide, then hissed 'stairs'. The slide immediately went from a slide to curving stairs. This was a little trick Harry had picked up one time the Order had used the Chamber to escape a Death Eater attack on Hogwarts.

He slowly made his way down the stairs, cleaning as he went. It was far from a bang-up job, but that would have to wait 'till he had more time. He made his way down the long passage way, until he came to the second entrance.

'Open' he hissed. The stone snake slithered around, and the large stone door creaked open.

As he walked in, he cast a charm on his eyes that would allow him to look upon the Basilisk without being petrified, or more importantly, dead, well, at least it was more important to some people. Harry knew there were worse fates than mere death.

Harry drew his wand, and started hissing the password.

"Great Basilisk, I summon you from the mouth of Salazar Slytherin, greatest of the Hogwarts Four."

;Ugh! Some people were so conceited.

The mouth slowly opened, and the great snake started to slither out.

"Who summons me?" the snake hissed out "I smell blood." came the sadistic hiss

"I'm sure you do." Harry muttered under his breath, before reverting back to Parseltounge.

"It was I, great basilisk. I've come to humbly request your assistance." Hey, a little flattery never hurt anyone.

The snake seemed to sniff the air.

"You are not my master's heir. Yet you speak the noble tongue. How is that?"

"You're right, I'm not Tom..."

"Then I'm supposed to kill you." The snake hissed, and the 60 foot monster moved to strike

Harry quickly dodged the deadly fangs, and yelled 'PETRIFICUS TOTALIS MAXIMUS'

The body bind curse hit the serpent dead on, and the body immediately froze.

Harry then waved his wand again, and only unfroze the snake's head.

"Now" he hissed calmly, unfazed by the amount of power he had just used. "You will listen to me, then if you still wish to attack me, I won't stop you.

"How were you able to do that?" the snake's voice held hint of amazement. "No wizard should be able to affect my kind like this."

Harry smirked. "Let's just say that I'm not your typical wizard. But let's get back to your original question. How am I able to speak the noble tongue? Simple, I may not be Tom, but I am an 'Heir of Slytherin'."

"That's impossible." the serpent hissed "Tom said that he was the last of his line."

“Well, he was right about that. He’s the last natural born ‘Heir of Slytherin’, but it’s not impossible that I’m one. You see, about 10 years ago, Tom came after me. He tried to kill me, because of a prophecy. Well, obviously he didn’t succeed. Instead, he ‘marked me as his equal. He transferred many of his powers to me, and inadvertently, made me an honorary ‘Heir of Slytherin’.”

“That’s ridiculous.” the snake hissed, disbelievingly

“You think so. Well, how about this? Only an ‘Heir of Slytherin’ can bear this mark.”

He waved his hand over the top of his left hand. The glamour charm slowly melted away, revealing two intertwined black snakes, circling around a much larger golden snake, which greatly resembled a Basilisk, with the crest of the Slytherin line behind it. He pressed his thumb to the mark, and the mark started to glow as the snakes started slither and hiss.

“Slytherin’s mark; his own design. He preferred bearing this mark then his family crest. Then at the end of life, he cursed the mark so none but a true heir could bear it.”

The snake seemed taken aback. “I know this.” the snake hissed “Forgive me...Massster.”

Harry waved it off. “Nothing to forgive.”

“So what are your orders? Killing Mudbloods, Half-Bloods? I’m ssstarving!”

Harry frowned. “Is that what Tom told you that you were supposed to do?”

“Of course. They are inferior, and not nearly as powerful.”

“Well...would you say Tom is powerful?”

“Of course. He’s my master’s heir.” He answered haughtily

“What about me?”

“Of course.”

“Well, we’re both half-bloods. Do you really think Tom intended for you to kill himself?”

The snake didn’t seem to know what to say.

“So what do you want from me?”

Harry pursed his lips. “I want you to rebuke Tom.”

WHAT?! NEVER!” The snake tried to strike, but the body bind held true.

“Look, the only thing Tom wanted to do was use you for his own purposes. He wanted you as his own personal assassin. How long has it been since he came to visit you? 50 years? He doesn’t care about you. And I don’t think your original master intended for you to become a murderer of children.”

The serpent seemed confused. “Ssso...what is my purpose?”

“Your original master, Salazar Slytherin, was a great wizard. He built this Chamber, and helped to build this school. But...he was different, special. He could talk to snakes, and that was mistakenly seen as conversing with ev...well, it was frowned upon. There was a...misunderstand...between Salazar and the other Founders. But Salazar still loved this school, and everything that it stood for. When he placed you here, I truly believe that he meant for you to help protect and defend the school he loved so much, that he helped create. Not destroy it from the inside out, for that’s exactly what will happen if students start dying.”

The giant serpent seemed to be digesting these words. When he finally spoke again, his words came slowly.

“Very well...I will...rebuke Tom and follow you. But what about the others. Won't they try to kill me when they find out about me? Tom said they would. Plus, I'm starving!”

Harry chuckled. “Well, you're right about the others, but for now, no one will know about you, other than myself. As for eating, this chamber lies under the lake, and these pipes not only lead all throughout the school, but also into the Forbidden Forest. As long as you stay out of sight, you can do all the hunting you wish. Just not student or teacher, oh, or Centaurs.” he added as an afterthought “Just try to do most of your hunting at night. It's okay to do some during the day, as long as you're deep enough into the Forest.”

The snake bowed again. “As you command.”

“By the way, what's your name?” Harry asked curiously

The serpent shook his head. “Tom called me Theodotus. I'm not sure if my original master called me anything.”

‘Theodotus. That was a strange...’ Harry closed his eyes and slowly shook his head. Tom had been so....far-gone...even at 15. How come so few had taken notice?

Harry sighed. “That name is an insult to you and your original master, Salazar.”

The snake looked confused. “What do you mean?”

“The name ‘Theodotus’ stems from Latin origins. It means ‘God's slave’. Even at 15, Tom thought himself a god!” Harry growled venomously

Harry felt a tidbit of anger leak from the snake, as well.

“How about a more appropriate name? Is there anything you'd like to be called?”

The snake shook his head. “I don't know.” Harry still felt anger from the snake.

Harry thought for a moment. "Well...how about...how about a name that...honors your Master's original purpose for placing you here? How about...how about the name 'Carnell'. It's of English origin, and it means 'defender of the castle'."

The snake's anger seemed to subside slightly, and was replaced with a hint of pride.

"Yes, I like that."

"Good. Now, I just need two other things from you. The first is that I need to place a spell on your eyes to remove their 'deathly glare'. I realize that this may be a bit of an inconvenience, but, otherwise, you'll be instantly killing everything that crosses your path, and that would be a bit too...counterproductive, so with your permission..."

The snake nodded in understanding, and Harry carefully cast the necessary charms.

"Thank you. Now, for the second request. You carry an item on your back that I desperately desire."

"How do you know about that? Tom said that he would be the only one to know about that!"

"He also said that he would be the only one who would be able to remove it. Correct?"

Carnell nodded.

"Then if I can remove it, can I have it?"

"Umm...of course."

Harry walked to the snake's back, and drew his dagger. He ran the blade across his palm, and let several drops fall onto the protection spells. The spells were quickly neutralized, and the concealment charms slowly disappeared, revealing a very ancient, antique wand.

Harry slowly picked it up, then, as if it had burnt his hand, dropped it to the ground. He pulled out a vial of the 'soul killing' potion, the last one he hoped he'd ever have to touch!

He performed the ritual as he had for the last 4. The cry from the Horcrux came, signaling its destruction.

Harry breathed a HEAVY sigh of relief. This part of the job was done. Now, came the HARD part!

The snake interrupted his thoughts.

"What was THAT?!" Carnell hissed angrily "I felt the DARK magic that came from it!"

"That was a problem that needed to be dealt with. And you're right. It was VERY DARK magic."

He picked up the now 'soulless' wand, and shrunk it, before adding it to his 'collection'.

"Now, I know you're hungry. If you go down this set of tubes, you should come out deep enough into the Forbidden Forest for you to hunt to your heart's content." With a flick of his wrist, Harry removed the body bind.

The snake bowed low. "Thank you, Master. I will follow your orders and respect your wishes."

Harry bowed back. "Thank you, Carnell. You are truly a magnificent creature."

"Are you going to be accompanying me, Master?"

"Oh, I wish I could, but I've got to check out Slytherin's private office and library, then get back before I'm missed."

Harry spent the next two hours going through the stuff Salazar had left behind. Not only had the dodgy old codger left behind a lush and lavish personal study with a private library with some of the oldest

and rarest books, some of which, believing to have been permanently lost or destroyed.

He also had a charmed magical ceiling above his study. It allowed the viewer to check on any part of the castle and most of the grounds, just by stating the location. The only exceptions were the bedrooms and the bathrooms, but everything else was free game. This included all 4 of the Common Rooms, the classrooms, the Great Hall, and the topper, the Headmaster's office. As long as he could sneak away, Harry now had easy access to any conversation within the castle.

There was also another plus. Salazar had installed a way to travel to and from his office to any of the locations the ceiling showed. It wasn't apparation, per say. Salazar had been a genius when it came to Ancient Runes. He had used that knowledge, along with a combination of phoenix and elfin magic to create a means of instant transportation. The activation spells could only be spoken in Parseltounge.

Harry decided to use it now. He concentrated on the lawns in front of the lake. The scene suddenly appeared. There were a few students milling around, enjoying the cool Fall weather, and extra break from classes.

Harry drew his wand, tapped a certain pattern on the wall, until several glowing 'runes' appeared. Harry hissed the spell, touched the runes with his left hand, and was gone.

Later on

Hey Uncle Mooney,

Guess what! The teachers COULDN'T figure it out! They tried EVERYTHING, but in the end, the spell just wore off after 12 hours, about 8:30 last night. I think Fred and George were a bit disappointed. I got the feeling that they like impersonating Snape, especially since the prank couldn't be tied to them.

It's the talk of the whole school right now, and everyone's trying to figure out who the 'Golden Vipers' are. The teachers think they have to be older students, since the potions and spell work was so advanced, at least that's what they're saying. I think they're just embarrassed that they couldn't figure it out, but who knows? (sly smile)

Anyway, gotta get to class. I've got my first Quittich practice tonight. I'm REALLY excited! Although I'm not sure how well I'll do. Anyway, Ron's calling. Luv ya bunches.

TTYL,

Harry

Hey Kiddo,

I suppose congrats are in order, uh, to the Golden Vipers, I mean. James and Sirius would be so proud that someone is carrying on the prank tradition. If you find out who these pranksters are, just remind them not to get into too much trouble.

Don't worry about Quittich. If you have half the skills your dad did, you'll be the best one out there, and your mum was no novice either. She could really give us a real run for our money in our pick up games.

Anyway, let me know how your practices go, and when your first game is. I'd love to come and see you, since the games are open to the public. They usually start around November.

I know that Sirius would want to come. Don't worry too much about Sirius. Karin, the uh lawyer, is working really hard on his case. We've almost got a court date, but the Ministry's being really stubborn. Don't worry. I won't stop fighting 'till Sirius is cleared. Well, I've got to get back to work. Luv ya too, and Congrats again.

Uncle Mooney

Harry reread over Remus' letter. Several things stuck out to him. The first being Sirius' case. He knew it wasn't going as well as Remus alluded to. He had been getting weekly reports from Karin's office on all of the cases the law firm was handling for them, as Jacob Myers, of course. The Ministry considered the case closed, and were thereby making it extremely difficult to get a Wizengamot court date. Harry had faith in Karin, and the law firm as a whole, but he also knew how difficult the Ministry could make life for you, if you decided to tango with them, and sometimes, even if you didn't.

Harry prayed the diplomatic and legal approach would work, but if not, he would, personally, have to take drastic measures. If the Ministry wanted to play dirty, he would fight fire with fire.

The second thing he noticed was Mooney's mention of coming to his Quittich game. It worried him. It's not that he didn't want his uncle there. He would love it if he was there, and they were open to the public. But, he was afraid that Remus' mere presence would alert Albus to the fact that Harry and Remus had met, and possibly, lead him to discovering Remus' current status as guardian.

So far, Albus had kept his nose out of Harry's business, but he was afraid that that wouldn't last. In his original timeline, the first time Harry had truly come face to face with the old wizard was when he had found the Mirror of Erised. The only other time Albus had personally talked to him was at the end of the year, after he had faced Quirrell/Tom, and had been unconscious in the hospital wing for 3 days.

Harry couldn't decide whether or not to just go through the traps, and get that bloody stone now, or just try and go through with his plans. For now, he knew that Tom wouldn't go after the stone 'till the end of the year. Albus had claimed that he had just 'suddenly realized' that Hogwarts was where he needed to be. In fact, it had been an object he carried around with him if any of the wards protecting the stone had been breached, and that object had gone off like a 'firecracker' when Harry, Ron, and Hermione had fallen through the trap door that Fluffy had been guarding. Of course Quirrell had known how to get around them. Well, Harry knew about them this time, and he seriously considered pulling the old switch-er-roo.

The third thing Harry noticed was on a happier note. His uncle had recognized his not-so-subtle hint in the last letter that Harry was now part of this new prank group, the 'Golden Vipers' that threatened to wreak havoc and mayhem on the unsuspecting residents of Hogwarts. Remus had been the responsible adult and guardian by telling him not to go too far or get into too much trouble. On the other hand, Remus had been the true Marauder, by subtly adding 'Don't get caught!'

Well, Harry wouldn't worry about the stone or Quirrell for the moment. He would have to see how this month went. Halloween was coming up, and Quirrell would be letting that stupid troll in. He was going to everything within his power to make sure none of his friends or classmates got hurt this time around.

Finally done.

First off, here's the translation-for those of us who don't speak pig latin:

What the BLOODY HELL is going on?-Ron

Ronald, watch your language?-Hermione

Hermione, look at your reflection! You're McGonagall!"-Ron

When I...My brothers...I'm going to kill...-Ron

Anyway, please let me know what you think. Your reviews just help me get the next chapter out faster. I'll finally be getting to Halloween in the next chapter.

Thanks

Midnight Star 25

A Troll of a Bond

The cooler October weather came in fast and the Quidditch season was in full swing. Practice was an interesting affair for Harry. The thing was, Harry was supposed to be the novice of the group. Everyone knew that he had grown up in the muggle world; at least they did, thanks to Ron, the twins, and the Hogwarts' gossip system. Harry partially remedied the source of his Quidditch knowledge by saying that he'd read a lot about it, and would often be seen with a book, such as a Quidditch through the Ages. He passed the rest off as natural talent, which was partially true, but it also came from playing and honing his skills over the last (uh future?) twenty years. He knew that it was something of an unfair advantage, but, uh, hey, what could he do?

To say that Wood was 'impressed' with his skills was so far beyond an understatement. Wood was ECSTATIC! The 'first time' he tried a Wronski feint, and pulled it off flawlessly, Wood nearly fainted. He was even more adamant about keeping Harry a secret 'till the first game, then the first time around.

The twins were impressed too, and were more excited then ever about adding Harry to their prank plans. But, perhaps, the ones that were most impressed were Ron and Neville. Harry could tell that Ron was a bit jealous, perhaps, even more so then last time. At least Harry wasn't so caught up in himself or his own problems this time to ignore it.

Neville, on the other hand, was quietly impressed. Harry might even say that he was a bit intimidated. Harry was going to try and remedy that. He knew that both boys had talent. Ron had a confidence problem, as seen in his 5th year, and Neville had something of the same problem, just in a different way.

Harry had gotten to know Augusta Longbottom during the war, after Neville had joined the Order after graduation. Harry understood her incessant need to protect her grandson. She had lost her son in one of the worst ways possible, then was immediately thrust into the role of 'mother' to an infant, as well as caregiver to her incapacitated son

and daughter-in-law. Anyone thrown into that situation could become a bit paranoid and overprotective.

It was now Saturday. Halloween was in 3 days, and Harry needed a distraction.

Ron had been begging Harry to let him ride his Nimbus, so he now found himself out on the Quidditch Pitch with Ron, Neville, and the twins. They'd even convinced Hermione to join them, even though she wasn't just thrilled about it.

"Come on Hermione, It's not that bad." Said Fred

"Yeah, we've all done it." Added George.

"If Hermione doesn't want to, I'll take her turn." Interjected Ron, helpfully

"That broom is awesome! You've got to try it" threw in Neville

"I just...don't like flying." Hermione argued, nervously

"Nonsense, Mia. You've only tried a couple of times during lessons, and we really didn't get to fly then."

"But..."

"Come on. I'll go up with you, just 'till you get the hang of it."

"Haaarry..."

He grabbed her hand, and pulled her onto the broom.

"Harry..." she said fearfully.

He sat behind her, and positioned her hands in the right position, then gently kicked off. Hermione squeezed her eyes shut, and bit her bottom lip. Harry slowly circled the pitch.

"Come on, Herm. Open your eyes."

“Hmm.” She whimpered softly. She slowly opened one eye, then quickly closed it.

Okay, this wasn’t working. Time to play his trump card.

“Think about Aladdin.” He whispered

Her eyes popped open, and she whipped her head around.

“WHAT?!”

“Aladdin.” He replied innocently. “You know, Disney? The magic carpet ride scene. Princess Jasmine was nervous about flying at first too, then Aladdin showed her how much fun it could be.”

“I always thought it was carpet, not Aladdin that should get the credit.” She admitted.

Harry chuckled. “So you do know the movie.”

She nodded. “It’s one of my favorites. But how would you know something like that?”

Harry shook his head. “I didn’t” he lied. “But there’s only so many forms of magical travel displayed in movies, and that’s the first one that comes to mind. Hey, watch this.”

He pulled out his wand, and quietly muttered a spell. All of a sudden, a soft melody started playing.

I can show you the world

Shining, shimmering, splendid

Tell me, princess, now when did

You last let your heart decide?

I can open your eyes

Take you wonder by wonder

Over sideways and under

On a magic carpet ride

A whole new world

A new fantastic point of view

No one to tell us no

Or where to go

Or say we're only dreaming

Harry could see Hermione visibly relax as the music played.

"How'd you do that?" she whispered

"Oh, just a spell I read about. Do you like it?"

Without hesitation, she nodded. She swayed gently to the music.

"So are you relaxed?"

She nodded again.

"Good, cause look." He pointed down. They were now hovering high above the Quidditch pitch.

She gasped slightly, and grasped the broom with both hands. The music still played.

"Relax." Harry soothed "You're doing fine. Now, just tell the broom what you want it to do, okay. It'll obey your command. Just like carpet. Pretend you're Princess Jasmine, and you're going back to the castle..."

“Palace.” She corrected him

“Huh?”

“In the movie, it’s always referred to as a palace, not a castle.”

Harry chuckled “Right you are. Now, let’s slowly go back to the palace before Jafar and Iago come after us, oops, I meant Snape and Malfoy.”

She giggled at the analogy.

“Alright.” She started humming the tune, almost getting lost in it.

Harry felt her take control of the broom. He took his hands, and slipped them around her waist. It felt good to be this close to her again. Hermione had been best friend since 1st year, the practical one, and his rock and anchor, especially after Ginny and his children had been so brutally murdered. She had been there for him in a way Ron couldn’t be, after all, Ron was grieving the death of his only sister, along with a niece and nephew.

Looking back on that, Harry couldn’t see how she had managed to stay so strong. She had been grieving the loss of a sister-in-law, niece, and nephew, as well, but Harry had been so caught up in his own grief, he hadn’t been able to deal with anything else. Burying your wife and three-year-old children can do that to you.

Tears were starting to well up in his eyes, even as he thought back, but he quickly brushed them aside, and brought his thoughts back to the present.

He was surprised to see that they were still up in the air. Hermione was circling the pitch at a faster speed than Harry would have expected.

“Having fun?” he questioned softly

She didn’t reply, but Harry could see a smile playing on her lips.

The kids finally trooped inside, just as the sun was going down.

"You did really good today, Hermione." Neville said quietly

Hermione blushed slightly

"Thanks. It...was more fun then I thought."

"Now we just need to teach you about Quidditch." Laughed Ron

"I don't think so!" she said quickly

Harry smiled. "We'll see, Mia. We'll see."

The next 3 days passed quickly. Everyone was looking forward to the Halloween feast, but Harry couldn't get excited about it, knowing what was coming.

The night of the feast had finally come. They had successfully gotten through the day, without Ron insulting Hermione, with Harry running just a little bit of interference. The four 1st years were currently making their way to the Great Hall, when, all of a sudden, Malfoy rounded the corner, flanked by Crabbe and Goyle.

"Well, well, well, what do we have here?" Draco taunted

"Shove off, Malfoy." Harry sighed. This was the last thing he needed.

"Saw you and your little girlfriend out on the Quidditch pitch the other day. You two looked...cozy." He drawled

"Can it!" Harry growled

"I guess after your father married one, you couldn't hope to aspire to anything better. Filthy little Mudblood!" he shot venomously

Draco suddenly found himself pinned against the wall with three wands at his throat. Harry was surprised at Neville's reaction, and a little bit at Ron's.

"You're asking for it, Malfoy!" Ron ground out

"Aww, does the wittle baby Weasle wuv the Mudblood too? Or perhaps Longbottom here? I've always heard the Longbottoms were a bit...cucuou."

Malfoy was suddenly hit with three hexes. Neville had cast a jelly-legs jinx, while Ron had cast an itching charm, and Harry had cast a boils curse.

At this, Malfoy was scratching all over, as small red bumps were popping up on his body.

"What...scratch...did...you...scratch...do?"

"Try anything like that again, and you'll get far worse." Harry warned

"Crabbe, Goyle, GET ME OUT OF HERE!" he ordered, his jelly legs making it hard for him to walk.

Harry smirked as the quickly scampered away.

"Thanks guys, that was some good spell work." Harry praised

"Couldn't let you have all the fun, mate. Not after what he said."

"Yeah, My Uncle Algie sat me down one time, and told me if I EVER used that word, as well as a few other ones, he'd chunk me straight into Azkaban, and throw away the key."

"My dad pretty much said the same thing, except that he said he'd let my mother do the punishing, and she's 10 times scarier then any old prison."

They turned back around.

“Hermione, are you alright?” but she wasn’t there

“Hey, where’d she go?” asked Ron

“Damn it.” Harry swore under his breath

“I think I know. Come on.” But before they could move

“Mr. Potter, Mr. Weasley, Mr. Longbottom. What are you doing out here?” The stern voice of their Head-of-House rang in their ears

“Uh, Professor, we were just...” “Professor, see...” Ron and Neville stumbled

“Professor, it’s Hermione, uh, someone said some really terrible things to her, and she ran off. I’m afraid she’s pretty upset. We just wanted to go find her, and make sure she’s okay.”

Despite herself, McGonagall was touched by the obvious concern her students were displaying.

“I’m sure Miss Granger appreciates your concern, but, perhaps she just needs time to collect herself. Now, you three need to go to the feast. I’m sure Miss Granger will join us in a bit.”

“But Mi...Professor.” Harry caught himself before he called her Minerva.

“No, Mr. Potter. The three of you inside. Now!”

Harry sighed. He hadn’t felt so helpless since he’d come back. The three boys reluctantly obeyed.

‘Maybe she didn’t go to that bathroom.’ Harry kept thinking, but he had a sinking feeling that she had.

‘Damn it, why was fate so adamant on repeating itself?!’

The feast started, then...right on cue...Quirrell came bursting through the door.

“TROLL IN THE DUNGEON!”

Once again, mass panic...Dumbledore...prefects.

Without a word, Harry stood up, and was out the door, with Ron and Neville only half a step behind. He had kind of hoped they wouldn't follow, but they weren't Gryffindor's for nothing.

“Mate, slow down.” Ron panted

“Where are we going?” heaved Neville

Harry's pace didn't slow, but he did answer. “Hermione, she doesn't know about the troll.”

They had arrived at the bathroom. Soft sobbing could be heard from the inside.

“HERMIONE! Harry shouted, pounding on the door

“Go away.” Came the sobbed reply

“Hermione, there's a troll!” said Ron, frantically

A moment later, the door slowly opened to reveal a puffy-eyed Hermione.

“What?”

“It's true, Hermione. A troll's on the loose. We've got to get to the Common Room!”

“Uh Harry, do trolls carry clubs?”

“Sometimes.” He said slowly

“Then I think he just found us!”

They turned around.

“RUN!” Harry screamed

3 of the 1st years turned to flee, but before they could do so, the troll slammed his club into the floor, knocking all 4 of them off their feet.

Harry was the first one up, and in battle stance, his wand drawn.

“Diffindio!” He shouted

The spell just seemed to bounce off the troll.

‘Duh.’ Trolls were highly resistant to regular magic.

“Rictusempra!”

“Wingardium Leviosa!”

Both spells from Ron and Neville had no effect on the troll.

Then Harry got an idea.

“Hermione, aim the levitating spell at the trolls club!” he shouted dodging the trolls fist. “But wait till it has it over it’s head!”

She got the message, and nodded.

Harry shot a powerful cutting hex at the troll, that barely nicked its shoulder, but still made it cry out in pain and anger.

It lifted its club to attack.

“NOW!”

Three shouts of ‘Wingardium Leviosa’, rang out.

Harry silently cast a stunner at the troll, with the same amount of power he had used with the ‘body bind’ curse on Carnell the other day. It was enough to knock any magical creature out, no matter how resistant to magic they were. Harry cast a second silent spell,

canceling out the levitating charms on the club, conking the troll on the head, just before it collapsed.

Harry let out a sigh of relief. History had repeated itself, but...maybe, this time, Harry could work with fate...just a little. After all, this had been the original event that had solidified his, Hermione's, and Ron's friendship. His friends...no...his family was safe for the moment, and he had every intention of keeping it that way.

All of a sudden, voices could be heard coming down the hall. Harry quickly moved to his friends.

"Quiet, someone's coming. Be still and don't move." He ordered.

Without another seconds hesitation, he silently cast a disillusionment shield around the 4 of them.

Just as before, McGonagall appeared, closely flanked by Snape.

"Severus, LOOK!" gasped McGonagall "What happened here?!"

"Do I look like a bloody seer?" muttered Snape bitterly

"We must inform Albus."

"Indeed." He grumbled

"Is it dead?"

Snape moved next to it. "Ugh, unfortunately not."

The two teachers argued for a moment about what to do, before walking away, levitating the troll behind them.

Only when Harry no longer sensed their presence, did he release the shield.

"Are you guys okay?"

"That was...AWESOME!" exclaimed Neville

Harry chuckled

“Yeah, it was pretty cool.” agreed Ron

“Hermione?”

Tears were starting to well up in her eyes

“It’s all my fault.” she wailed “If I hadn’t of run off...”

Harry stopped her.

“Hermione, it is NOT your fault. Malfoy had NO BUSINESS saying those things. Believe me when I say he’s only repeating what his father says, but that’s still no excuse!”

“Yeah Hermione. My dad says that Malfoy used to be a big supporter of You-Know-Who. After he fell, they were some of the first to come back to our side. Claim to have been under some curse. But dad says that’s a crock. That he didn’t need a reason to go dark.”

Hermione still didn’t look convinced.

“But if I...”

“No buts, Hermione. We weren’t going to leave you out here. And in the end, we all helped take out the troll. How many 1st years can say that?” Harry grinned “And besides, I think I learned something tonight.”

The three looked confused.

“What’s that mate?” asked Ron

“That you’ll stand beside me, despite the danger. That’s true friendship...and bravery. You all proved tonight just why you were sorted into Gryffindor, and that you truly belong.”

The kids seemed a bit embarrassed at the praise, but Harry just smiled.

“Come on, we’d better get back to the Common Room, before we’re missed.”

The 4 of them walked down the hall in silence, but Harry could tell that history had, once again, repeated itself. Only this time, it hadn’t just solidified Harry, Ron’s, and Hermione’s friendship, but now it included Neville.

Maybe he could work with fate...this time.

Okay, I know this is a shorter chapter, but I’m posting it in less then 24 hours of my last post, so I hope you’ll overlook the length.

I realize that Hermione is slightly ooc, but I really tried to stay true to her character. Let me explain the mindset I’m seeing her in. Yes, Harry is using some advanced spells in her presence, but she’s only 11 here, and has very little knowledge of how Harry grew up, so she has no reason to really suspect anything yet. Also, in the first part of this scene, once again, she’s 11, and every kid loves movies, even a book worm.

Okay, I’ve debated on whether or not to do this, but I’ve decided to go ahead with it. Let me make it very clear that this is purely optional, and simply for fun. You do not have to participate in this. There’s a mistake in this chapter, and I realized it after I wrote it, but it wasn’t a big deal and didn’t affect the story, so I decided not to change it.

Here’s the challenge. If you can figure out the mistake, and send the correct answer to me in an e-mail or review, I’ll send you an excerpt from the next chapter before it’s posted.

I’ll post the answer and the penname of anyone who guesses correctly in the next chapter, but it’s going to be a long one, so it’s going to take me a few days.

Thanks for reading, and for all the reviews. You guys are AWESOME!

Midnight Star 25

QT: Quidditch Time

The next two weeks passed quickly. The cool November weather had officially set in, and Harry's first Quidditch game has arrived. Despite his concerns about Albus, Harry decided not to dissuade his Uncle from coming. He actually seemed excited about it, and Harry truly wanted him there. He had even mentioned something of a surprise.

That's where Harry was now. Outside, watching all of the public arrive. All of a sudden, there was a voice behind him.

"Well, if it isn't our Quidditch Star, himself."

Harry whirled around. "Uncle Mooney!" he exclaimed happily, throwing his arms around his Uncle

Remus returned the hug.

"Good to see you, Harry."

"I missed you."

Remus smiled. "I've missed you, too. The house has been way too quiet. Harry, you remember Ms. McAlister."

Harry was surprised to see the lawyer suddenly appear by his Uncle's side, but quickly shook it off.

"Of course, nice to see you, Ms. Karin."

"And you, Harry." She said kindly "Congratulations on making Seeker."

Harry smiled. "Thank you, but it was luck more than anything."

"That's not what our sons are saying."

Harry looked over to the two new arrivals.

"Mr. and Mrs. Weasley, good to see you again."

“You too, Harry. Ron’s told us all about you, and Remus is incredibly proud of you.”

Despite himself, Harry blushed.

“Don’t believe everything you hear, Mr. Weasley. I’m afraid much of it is greatly exaggerated.”

“I guess we’ll find out. Are you ready for the game?”

Harry shrugged. “As ready as I’ll ever be. I mean, it’s only Slytherin, right? How bad could they be?” he said innocently

All the adults chuckled at this.

“You know I was Slytherin, Harry.”

Harry put on a look of fear. “Then I guess I’d better really be on my toes today.”

That brought another round of chuckles.

All of a sudden, a cry of ‘HARRY!’ ‘HARRY!’

Two more redheads could be seen running across the field. They quickly closed the gap between themselves and the group.

“Harry, where have you been?” heaved Fred

“Yeah, Wood’s about to throw a caliption fit.” added George

Harry chuckled “I’m coming. Just had to say ‘hi’ to a few people first.”

“And it wouldn’t hurt you to take after Harry’s example.”

The twins spun around.

“MUM!” they exclaimed together

‘And Dad.’

‘What are’

‘you two’

‘doing here?’

“Is that any way to greet your parents, whom you haven’t seen in over two months?”

‘Sorry, dad.’

‘Just surprised’

‘to see you here.’

“Why didn’t you tell us you were coming?” asked George

“Just thought we’d surprise you. I’ve got some baby pictures I can show...”

“Muum.”

“So, who did you have to meet, Harry?”

Harry grinned. “Oh, Gred, Forge. This is Ms. Karin, and my Uncle Mooney.”

It took a minute for Harry’s words to register.

The twins’ eyes bugged out.

“This is Fred and George, also known as Gred and Forge, Pranksters Extraordinaires, as well as big time fans.”

Without warning, Remus’ hand was suddenly being shaken by 2 very enthusiastic 13-year-olds.

‘It is an’

'honor to'

'meet you'

'You've been'

'our inspiration'

'since 1st year!'

Harry inwardly laughed at the look on his Uncle's face.

"Okay guy's, that's enough. You're going to get him in trouble with your mother."

Indeed, Mrs. Weasley was observing the scene with intense curiosity, but she sighed.

"I won't even ask what you're talking about, but I am seriously considering taking back what we bought for you."

The twins looked up with interest.

"Uh, you don't have to do that, Mum."

"Yeah, we'll be good. Promise."

"I don't know. What do you think, Arthur?"

"Well, they haven't gotten into too much trouble yet. And as long as they manage to keep it that way, I don't think we'll have to take these back to the store."

With that, Arthur pulled out two small items, and muttered the counter shrinking charm.

The twins' eyes went big.

'Are those?'

'They are.'

'For us?'

"And I expect a win today." Their father joked

Despite being 13, both twins rushed up to their parents, and gave them big hugs.

'Thank you!'

'Thank you!'

'Thank you!'

'Mum and Dad!'

"We'll be sure to win on these!"

"Come on Forge, we've got to go test them out before the game!"

"Right you are, Gred. Harry you coming?"

"I'll be right behind you."

They gave their parents one final hug, before they were handed their new Lightning Rod RZ's, and raced off towards the Quidditch Pitch.

Harry couldn't suppress a smile.

"Well, I've got to go before Wood has my head. Will I see you after the game?"

Remus nodded. "But we can't stay too long."

Harry nodded.

"Molly, Arthur, would it be alright if we caught up with you in a moment?"

“Of course, Remus. We’ll meet you in the visitor’s stands.”

“Thank you.”

The couple walked off, and Harry turned towards his Uncle.

“What’s wrong, Uncle Mooney?” Harry was worried, and it showed in his voice.

“Oh nothing, Harry. Just that surprise I mentioned.”

“What?”

Remus smiled. “We got a court date!”

Harry shook his head. “Really?!” he asked in disbelief

Remus nodded. “Really. Karin just got confirmation yesterday.”

“When?”

“Well, we know how much you wanted to be there. Its a few days after you get out of school for Christmas, on the 19th.”

Harry couldn’t believe his ears. “YES!” he exclaimed happily. “Thank you so much, Ms. Karin!”

Karin smiled. “Don’t thank me yet, Harry. We still have to make the Ministry listen.”

“We will.” Harry said, confidently

He gave his Uncle one more hug, before starting to sprint away

“Oh, thanks for everything. To both of you. See you after the game.”
He called over his shoulder

Remus watched as his nephew disappeared. He put an arm around Karin, and they started walking towards the Quidditch Pitch.

“I’d say he’s pretty excited about the news.”

Karin chuckled. “I’d say that’s an understatement. I’m just afraid of giving him false hope. You know how tough the Ministry can be.”

Remus sighed. “I know, but I also know how tough you can be. If anyone can pull this off, it’s you.”

She leaned her head against his shoulder.

“I appreciate the confidence. I just hope it’s not misplaced.”

He stopped, bent down, and placed a gentle kiss on her lips.

“It’s not. Now come on. It looks like Molly and Arthur are saving us seats.”

The game finally got started. The two teams flew out with Lee Jordan commentating.

‘Welcome to the first Quidditch game of the season, Slytherin vs. GRYFFINDOR!’

The game got underway, and the first couple of minutes were just like the first time, except things were a little different with the twins.

‘AND WEASLEY BLOCKS ANOTHER ONE, AIMED AT THEIR NEW SEEKER, HARRY POTTER. THE TWINS ARE REALLY ON TOP OF THEIR GAME TODAY, AND I’D SAY...WHOA!...WAIT A MINUTE! ARE THOSE NEW BROOMS THEY’RE RIDING? TOP OF THE LINE, LIGHTNING BOLTS! THOSE THINGS ARE IN THE SAME LEAGUE AS THE NIMBUSES! THEY GO 0 TO 60 IN...’

‘JORDAN!’ McGonagall bellowed

“Sorry Professor. And Slytherin has control...”

Meanwhile, Harry's trained eyes expertly scanned the field. The Slytherin Seeker was doing the same thing. Harry couldn't spot the snitch anywhere.

Suddenly, a bludger came flying towards him. Sensing its presence, Harry easily dodged it.

One of the twins flew over to him, quickly hitting the bludger towards one of the Slytherin Chasers.

"Sorry, Harry. The bugger got away from us."

Harry waved them on. "No problem."

They flew off in the opposite direction, Harry flying higher, circling the pitch.

All of a sudden, the attack he had been waiting for happened. His broom started to violently shake and buck.

Very calmly, Harry waved his hand over his broom, and muttered 'Finite Incantatem'.

'Take that, Quirrell.' Harry thought vindictively, before getting back to the task at hand.

He circled the pitch a few more times. The score was now 90 to 50 in favor of Slytherin. Harry needed to do something and fast.

At that moment, he spotted the glint of gold at the other end of the pitch. It didn't appear that the Slytherin Seeker had spotted it yet. Trying not to attract attention, he slowly moved that way.

Then without warning, a much stronger curse caused the broom to violently jerk, much stronger than the first time, and before Harry could counter it, a powerful bludger **SLAMMED** into him, knocking him off his broom. Harry was about 75 feet up in the air.

The crowd let out a collective gasp, but Harry didn't hear it.

Both Albus and Remus, along with a few others had drawn their wands, but before anyone could react, Harry took control of the situation, paying no attention to the crowd.

He reacted purely out of instinct. He closed his eyes, and concentrated, magically slowing his descent. Then let out a loud whistle. 'Whh..whht.'

His broom instantly stopped falling, and quickly flew to its master's side.

Harry grabbed the broom handle, swung his leg over, and zoomed off.

The crowd let out a loud stunned gasp, before loud applause and cheering came from the students. Harry heard none of it, only the wind whistling in his ears.

The Slytherin Seeker had spotted the snitch, and was now gaining on it. Harry urged his broom to go faster and faster, pushing it to its limits, and then some! He and the Slytherin seeker were now neck and neck!

The snitch suddenly took a dive, as did both seekers. The snitch sped up, frantically racing towards the ground!

The ground was getting closer. 20! 15! 10! Both brooms were racing! 5! 4! The Slytherin Seeker felt that that was too close for comfort, but Harry kept going. Dives were his specialty. 3! 2! 1 ½! 1!

Harry pulled his broom up, at the last second! Mere inches from the ground!

He never heard the mixture of gasps and cheers that echoed through the stands, nor did he see the ashen face of his Uncle.

He pulled up, shot his hand out, and quickly closed it around the fluttering ball!

He brought his broom to a halt, and let out a contented sigh. He had forgotten how good it felt how good it felt to let go, and REALLY fly!

There was so much freedom in it, and he absolutely loved it. It had been the one thing in the war that Tom had not been able to take away from him. It had been his escape when things had become too hard to deal with.

Lost in his thoughts, he only vaguely heard Jordan shout 'GRYFFINDOR WINS!'

Before he knew it, he was surrounded by his teammates along with half the student population, minus the Slytherins, of course.

He was getting slaps on the back, and congratulations all around. He finally heard two familiar voices.

"That was BLOODY BRILLIANT, Harry!"

"Yeah, where'd you learn to FLY like that?!"

A third voice cut in. "That was STUPID, Harry. You could have really gotten hurt."

"But it was BLOODY BRILLIANT, Hermione!"

Harry just smiled. He was used to Hermione reprimanding him about his flying stunts, even if she didn't know it.

"But it was stupid..."

His friends continued bickering, and the crowd started to disperse.

'PARTY IN THE GRYFFINDOR COMMON ROOM!' shouted Fred

At that moment, a loud voice cut in.

'HARRY JAMES POTTER!'

He looked over to see a livid werewolf coming his way. He could see a mixture of anger and fear on his Uncle's face.

Remus quickly closed the gap between the two of them, and without warning pulled his nephew into a tight embrace.

“Uhncl...Mooney” Harry heaved “kinda...need...to breath.”

Remus finally let go. “Are you okay?!” Remus’ voice was filled with fear.

“I...I’m fine.” Harry stammered

Remus breathed a sigh of relief. “Then don’t EVER scare me like that again! You could have KILLED yourself!”

“But I didn’t.” Harry said softly. He immediately knew that was the WRONG thing to say.

Remus went on a rant. Harry heard phrases like ‘not thinking’, ‘stupid risk’, and ‘reckless’.

“I warned Lily about naming you after your father, but NOO! It’s a Potter family tradition. You’ve got the same risk-taking spirit he did.”

Harry grinned. “Yeah, but you might not have been friends, otherwise.”

Remus’ face softened.

“AND you know how to get out of trouble like he did.”

Harry smirked. “It’s a gift.”

That made the group around him laugh.

Harry decided to change the subject.

“Uncle Mooney, these are my friends, Ron, Neville, and Hermione. Guys this is my Uncle Mooney and his ...girlfriend...Ms. Karin.”

Harry smirked at the two blushing adults, as he threw in the girlfriend comment.

The kids greeted the adults, and vice versa.'

"It's very nice to meet all of you." He turned his attention back on Harry "But DON'T think you're getting away that easily." Remus reprimanded "I want you to go straight to the hospital wing, and get checked out."

Harry groaned. "But Uncle Mooney" he whined "I hate hospitals, plus I'm fine. Nothing happened."

"Nu...Nothing happened." Remus sputtered "You fell over 25 feet before you pulled off that little stunt!"

"Yes, Mr. Potter. You should have gone straight to the Hospital wing as soon as the game was over."

Harry whirled around to see two new figures approaching.

"Madame Pomfrey, Professor Dumbledore." He addressed smoothly. "Really, I'm fine."

"Well, needless to say, I think it would make everyone feel better if you at least got checked out."

Harry rolled his eyes. "I'm not gonna get out of this, am I?"

Remus ruffled his nephew's hair. "Don't pull another stunt like that, and you won't have to worry about it."

"Remus, take it from the voice of experience. That never works."

Remus chuckled. "I know, Arthur. His father never listened, either."

"And that put him in the Hospital wing as well!"

"Good to see you, Madame Pomfrey."

"Poppy, Remus. You're no longer a student."

“Yes Remus, this is certainly a surprise.”

“Albus.” Remus said coldly

Harry saw his Uncle’s eyes narrow, and felt the anger Remus was radiating towards the older man. Harry was glad that Remus’ attention had been diverted elsewhere, but he knew that this wasn’t the time or place for Remus to confront Albus.

Remus had taken one hand, and pulled Harry into a protective embrace in front of him. Harry shot a look at Karin that distinctively said ‘Please help’. She gave him a slight nod, as if in understanding. She placed a comforting hand on Remus’ shoulder, and Harry just barely heard her whisper ‘not now’.

Harry felt his Uncle relax, if only in the slightest, and only slightly loosened his grip around Harry. Then Karin took charge.

“Madame Pomfrey, Professor Dumbledore. It’s good to see you again.”

“Karin...Parkinson, right? I don’t think I’ve seen you since you graduated.” Poppy greeted

“Yes, it’s been a long time, although it’s Karin McAlister, now. But my husband died several years ago.”

“Oh, I’m sorry.”

“Thank you. It was a boating accident, but John was always a risk taker.”

“Yes, well it’s good to have you back at Hogwarts dear.”

“Thank you.”

“And you, Mr. Potter. I want you in the hospital wing...right now!”

Harry grimaced. “Just a few minutes, Please.” Harry pleaded

“10 minutes, Mr. Potter. And you’d better be there!”

“Yes Ma’am!” Harry mock saluted

“Hmmpf.” She scowled

“Well, Remus, Karin, good to see you again. And Molly, Arthur, always a pleasure.”

“Thank you Poppy. And let us know if our boys are causing any trouble.” She said, glancing at her youngest son, who had been watching his whole exchange, along with Hermione and Neville.

“Of course, now if you’ll excuse me, I have a few patients that need attending.” With that, she turned, and headed back to the castle.

“Well, I’m afraid we need to get going as well. I’ve got a few things to finish up at the office, Remus, did you still want to do that consult on the Lester case today?”

Remus sighed. “Yeah, I want to get the ball rolling on that before Christmas.”

Albus spoke up. “Are you working at the Ministry, Remus?”

Remus was still feeling a bit hostile towards the man in front of him, but Karin was right. This wasn’t the time or the place. He would try to be courteous, if only for his nephew’s sake.

“No, I work for a new company in London.”

“As do Molly and I, Albus. I no longer work at the Ministry. I’m surprised you haven’t heard.”

“Albus actually did look surprised. “When did this happen?”

“Oh, this summer. I’m sorry; we’re going to have to cut this short, Albus. We really need to go. Ron could we see you for just a moment?”

Ron looked surprised but nodded, and walked away with his parents.

"I'm afraid we need to go too. Harry, congratulations on the win today. I look forward to seeing you play again."

Harry gave her a genuine smile. "Thank you, Ms. Karin. Just make sure this guy stays out of trouble." He grinned, jerking his thumb towards his Uncle.

For that, Harry received a whack on the back of the head.

"Hey! Are you trying to give Madame Pomfrey something to find?" he joked

"Just watch yourself, kiddo. Now you'd better get up to the hospital wing before Poppy sends out a search party."

Harry grimaced. He remembered just how strict his old friend and Healer could be. Harry nodded, then gave his Uncle one last hug.

"Bye Uncle Mooney. Thanks for coming." He gave one final wave, before racing back towards the castle.

Albus' face held a look of shock. "Mooney?" he questioned

Something in Albus' tone struck a nerve. "YES, Albus! I don't keep secrets from my nephew!"

Karin could tell the situation was about to spiral out of control.

"Albus! I'm afraid we really do need to go. It was good to see you again. Honey, lets go."

With that, she gently led a seething werewolf away from a very confused Headmaster.

Fortunately, Harry quickly got a clean bill of health from a reluctant Madame Pomfrey. He made his way back to the Gryffindor Common Room, and was instantly greeted by loud cheers and applause.

“AND HERE’S THE MAN HIMSELF! MR. HARRY POTTER! THE BOY-WHO-HELPED-BEAT-THE-PANTS-OFF-SLYTHERIN!”

Harry couldn’t help but grin at Fred and George’s enthusiasm. He could see that they had already raided the kitchens.

He scanned the room, and finally spotted his friends.

“Hey guys. How’s it going?”

Neville grinned. “Ron’s pouting, but he won’t say why.”

Harry looked at Ron, who, indeed, wore a frown on his face.

“What’s wrong?”

“Nothing.” Ron muttered under his breath “I can’t believe they’re real.” He added, although just barely audible.

Harry immediately recognized the problem. He sat down next to Ron.

“Ron. Yes, they’re real. Okay. I was there when your parents gave them to Fred and George a few hours ago.” Ron looked like he was about to interrupt, but Harry stopped him. “Look, First years can’t legally have brooms, plus I heard your parents say that they were early Christmas presents. Maybe you’ll get a surprise at Christmas, too.”

This thought seemed to cheer him up.

“I...I just don’t understand.”

Harry smiled. “Things change, Ron...all the time. For now just...go with the flow. Now come on, let’s enjoy this party while we can.”

Neville cut in. "Harry, mate, you've got to tell us where you learned to fly like that."

Harry just grinned in response.

Meanwhile in the Headmaster's office, Albus was pacing the floor. He was worried. Worried about Harry as well as Remus' attitude towards him today. Usually, about once a year, around Harry's birthday, Remus would come to him, asking to see Harry. Every year, Albus asked him to wait 'till Harry entered Hogwarts.

It was the best thing. The blood wards had kept Harry safe all these years, and the boy certainly didn't have a big head. Albus had spoken to his teachers. They all, well with the exception of Snape, described him as a hardworking, responsible student. He caught onto the material unusually quick, and could often be seen helping other students, yet was quiet and kept his head down in class.

He had a close knit group of friends; an unusual mix to say the least, but all Light families, and a muggleborn.

And today's Quidditch display! It shocked Albus, to say the least. He had never seen an 11-year-old fly like that, but that wasn't his main concern. It was Harry's control after he fell off the broom. Some might pass it off as accidental magic, but Albus could tell that Harry had known exactly what he was doing, and had placed specific charms on his broom. Perhaps an older student had told him how to, or perhaps Mr. Wood required him to do it. He truly wasn't sure. He planned on keeping an extra close eye on the boy.

But he had other problems on his mind. The troll attack on Halloween still had him gravely concerned, but at least no one had been hurt, although neither him nor any of his teachers could say with certainty just how the beast had become unconscious.

And Nicolas' stone. So far, it was still safe, but he was still concerned about an attempted theft, especially after the break in at Gringotts.

And Remus. He was shocked that the boy even knew him. He planned on having a long talk with Harry tomorrow. It was a Saturday, and a Hogsmeade Weekend, so the castle wouldn't be crowded, and less of a chance of interruption.

Okay, there's the Quidditch scene. What did you think?

The thing about the brooms. I completely made that line of brooms up. They are in the same league as the Nimbuses; they're just not as popular in England. Think of the Nimbuses as being native to England, and the Lightning Bolt line as being native to France or Spain. (You can take your pick) There's got to be other brooms that rival the Nimbuses. I just thought three Nimbus 2000's would be just a bit too much.

Anyway, thanks for reading. And PLEASE review. I LOVE THEM!

Midnight Star 25

Dealing

Harry woke up at 4:30 the next morning, just as he did every morning. It was a habit he'd become accustomed to during the war, and his mind wouldn't allow him to break it, not that he really wanted to. He used the time before his friends awoke to train and get into shape. In the future, he had trained heavily on a daily basis, and that training had saved his life more than once.

It had also given him a toned, firm body that had been essential for duels, hand-to-hand combat, tae kwon do, karate, and several other forms of muggle and magical combat. Now that he was back in his underfed, malnourished, and incredibly skinny (courtesy of the Dursleys) 11-year-old body, he was doing everything possible to get back in shape.

His eating habits were much healthier than that of an average 11-year-old. He coupled that with a set of nutrition potions tailored specifically to his body's chemistry.

He had a strict morning workout routine that he kept to, which was where he found himself heading now. He quietly slipped into the Common Room, walked to one part of the wall, right next to the portrait entrance. He waved his hand, stated his location and using Salazar's transportation system, was whisked away to the ROR.

As soon as his feet hit the ground, he thought of his indoors training arena, as well as his training tools. He went through his meditation ritual and morning exercises, before deciding to start with the deadly Katana.

After 3 ½ hours of training, Harry figured he'd better get back before he was missed. But, it was Saturday. He could probably get away with a little longer. He decided to go visit Carnell for a bit. He had only been able to slip away a few times, and he actually enjoyed his talks with this King-of-Serpents. It turned out that Carnell knew a great deal about the wizarding world and the magical creatures that neither Harry nor Tom had ever come across.

Harry, using Salazar's system, which he had deemed the 'SLYTHER' (a/n: kinda like the floo) slithered directly into Salazar's office, which he had deemed the 'Serpents Lair'.

He greeted Carnell, and before he knew it, an hour had passed. Now he really was pushing it. He was about to bid Carnell 'goodbye', when a question was posed.

"Massster." Carnell hissed

"Carnell, I told you. It's Harry." He hissed back

"Of course, Massster."

Harry rolled his eyes. "What is it, Carnell?"

"There are several...companions, I have met in the forest, and whom I hunt with, yet I usually only hunt at night..."

"And you wanted to know if they could come here?"

"Yes, Master."

"Of course. Forgive me for not addressing this problem earlier. Everyone deserves companionship. As long as they don't pose a threat to the school or its occupants, you may invite whoever you want."

"Thank you, Massster."

"It's Harry." He hissed over his shoulder, leaving behind a much happier Basilisk.

Harry used the 'Slyther' to go directly to a secret passageway on the 1st Floor, before making his way to the Great Hall.

The Hall was unusually crowded for a Saturday, then Harry remembered that it was a Hogsmeade weekend, and the students would be leaving at 10.

He looked around. The only ones he spotted were Fred, George, and Hermione.

He made his way over to the twins.

“Hey guys. Ready for Hogsmeade?”

“Hey Harrikins.”

“Yeah, we absolutely love Zonko’s.”

“They have the best stuff.”

“Oh, I don’t know. You guys are such good pranksters, I bet you could come up with a bunch of ideas that Zonkos never thought of. Ever thought about opening up your own joke shop?” Harry asked in his best ‘innocent’ voice, before taking a sip of pumpkin juice

The twins looked startled.

“How’d you know that?!”

Harry internally smirked. “What’d ya mean?” he shrugged “It’s just an idea.”

‘That’s been our goal since like 5-years-old’

‘When we pulled our first prank.’

“We were playing outside when we found we found a little tree frog.”

“Our brother, Percy, was eating Walden the Weird Every Flavor Pudding.”

“It changes flavors and colors as you eat it, and temporarily turns your mouth and tongue different colors, as well as anything you put in it.”

“Well we didn’t know that last part at the time.”

“We thought we’d have a good laugh, so I distracted him.”

“While I slipped the frog in the pudding.”

“Well, about a minute later, Percy screamed like a girl!”

“And when we ran inside to see”

“A half pink, half orange frog covered in yellow pudding was crawling up his face, and into his hair.”

Harry was crackin’ up now. Despite all of his years with the Weasleys, that was one story he had never heard.

It was then that McGonagall announced that it was time to leave for Hogsmeade.

The twins bid a still laughing Harry goodbye as most of the student population made their way out the doors.

Harry moved over towards his other friend.

“Hey Mia. Watcha reading?”

She looked up from her book. “Hogwarts. A History.” She answered shortly, before going back to the book.

Harry chuckled. “How many times have you read that, so far?”

She just glared at him. Harry grinned, and started filling his plate. He was lost in his thoughts, when an owl dropped a note in his lap. He quickly opened it. It read...

Mr. Potter,

Please meet me in my office at 10:30, this morning. I wish to go over a few items concerning yesterday. My office is behind the Gargoyle on the 5th floor.

Albus Dumbledore

PS: I love Sugar Quills.

If Harry had been reading this letter the first time around, he would have been extremely confused, and probably a bit nervous, wondering that he was in trouble, or something.

Not this time. Harry knew how the game was played, and how Albus operated.

He excused himself, and quickly made his way up the familiar route. He reinforced his mental shields, before giving the password, and knocking on the door.

“Come in Harry.”

‘Ugh’, that annoyed Harry to no end how Albus did that.

He opened the door. “Good Morning, Professor Dumbledore.”

“Good Morning, Harry.” Hmm, starting out with first names. “Please take a seat. Lemon Drop?”

Harry shook his head. “No thank you, sir.” He knew those infernal drops were laced with a subtle calming draught, as well as a mild potion to lower mental defenses.

“Well, how have classes been going?”

Always subtle aren’t you Albus. Time to turn the tables.

In the most guiltless, childlike voice he could muster, Harry asked, “Sir, am I in trouble?” biting his bottom lip, and shifting nervously for visual effect.

Albus’ obvious change in demeanor told him that it was working.

“Of course not, Harry. What would make you think that?”

Harry felt a gentle probing. Instead of completely blocking him, Harry sent false images and feelings of fear and inadequacy.

“You just...said something about yesterday.” He answered hesitantly. “I thought I might have done something wrong at the Quidditch Match.”

“Oh no. We were just...surprised at your...display of abilities, particularly when you fell off your broom.” Now Albus was fishing. Harry decided to bite.

“I...I was scared. I was just acting on instinct. Wood made us put a spell on our brooms so that we could call them to us. I thought it was stupid, but I guess it saved me from getting really hurt.”

It was a lie, and if Albus looked into it, he would find that Wood had done no such thing. Harry, himself, had placed more than one protective spell on his broom that he deemed mandatory from his years of experience.

“I see. And where did you learn that particular levitating spell. It’s well beyond 1st year material.”

Harry could have kicked himself, or just strangled Albus for being so annoyingly nosy. He preferred the latter. ‘Make up a story, FAST.’

“I don’t know what you mean, Professor.” Harry responded, cautiously “I...I was thinking of the spell ‘Wingardium Leviosa’. We learned it in Charms a few weeks ago. I don’t know if it worked right, but...well...I guess it stopped me from falling.”

Albus gave him a calculating look. “Well, that was very quick thinking, Harry. Not many people could have done that.”

“Thank you, sir.” Harry said, quietly

“I know many people were relieved to know that you were unharmed, especially Mr. Lupin.”

Albus said it casually, but Harry could hear the question behind it. He looked up.

“You mean, Uncle Mooney? Yeah, he’s really nice.” Harry exclaimed enthusiastically

“How did the two of you meet?”

Harry decided to go with part of the truth.

“In Diagon Alley, a few days before school started. It was weird at first. He called me James. But then he apologized, and said that I looked just like my father at his age. I...I guess I was excited me meet someone who knew my parents. I never knew them, and my relatives would never tell me much. Uncle Remus told me some things about my mum and dad, and how he and dad were best friends in school. He told me about being a werewolf, and how you and dad helped him. Before I left, I asked if I could write to him during school, and he said ‘sure’.”

Harry felt Albus’ probing again, and fed him a brief glimpse of him and Remus in the Leaky Cauldron, before obviously rubbing his forehead.

“Umm, Professor, was there anything else? I’ve really got a headache; maybe from yesterday. I think I need to get a headache relieving potion from Madame Pomfrey.”

Harry felt Albus pull back.

“Of course, Harry. No, there’s nothing else. You may go.”

“Thank you, sir.”

“And Harry.”

“Yes sir.”

“If you need help with anything, my doors always open.”

Harry nodded. "Thank you sir." Before quickly exiting the office.

Harry rolled his eyes. Albus was too nosy for his own good, among other things.

Albus, on the other hand, was feeling somewhere between relieved and concerned. He was sure the boy knew more than he was telling, he just couldn't put his finger onto what that was.

He was just going to have to stick to his original plan. Watch the boy like a hawk.

Harry was currently making his way down the long lost path to Hagrid's hut.

He hadn't officially met his old friend, and he missed him. Plus, he had a favor to ask him.

He knocked on the heavy door, and a moment later, was standing in the shadow of his half giant friend.

"Hi, Hagrid. I was told I could find you here. I'm Harry."

The giant seemed speechless for a moment, before a big smile broke out on his face.

"Of course." He answered. "I 'avent seen you since you were a baby."

Harry nodded. "I know. Someone told me. I came to thank you for that. Could I come in?"

The giant nodded, and moved aside to let him in.

The meeting with Hagrid had gone well. He thanked him for rescuing him that night, then Hagrid got to telling him about all of his creatures. Harry had spent a good portion of the afternoon there, and

considered the day a success. Now, Harry had one bit of...well...a problem, and it was currently lying on his best friend's pillow.

'Ugh'. That traitorous little rat! If...Okay...WHEN that rat disappeared, Ron would be devastated, maybe. Harry just had to decide when that would be. He didn't want to deal with a mopping Ron for weeks, but he had to get that rat before Sirius' trial, which meant right before Christmas.

Harry figured a few days before they left for Christmas break would probably work. He didn't know if the Weasley's were still staying at school this time around. Things were different.

The Foundation was only closed for a week, due to the nature of the business, and mandatory staff remained on call. When you deal with people, particularly children, there's really no such thing as a holiday, but Fabian said they didn't seem to mind, especially when he announced that it was a paid holiday.

And he had worked out the staff rotation for the safe houses, so that all staff would get a chance to visit their families. He had also planned a big Christmas celebration for all the kids currently in their custody, which currently numbered over 30, complete with food, decorations, lots of presents, and a Santa to hand them out.

He had also started working on his personal gifts. He wanted to make sure that this was an extra special Christmas, especially for Sirius. Sirius WOULD be out of jail and Remus...well...Harry wanted them to see this as a fresh start.

No more Dursleys, no more Azkaban, and no more running.

Harry was set out to create a better future. He had already started making changes, and he would continue. He just hoped it would be enough.

Okay, a couple of notes.

One, Sorry if you wanted to see Harry's interaction with Hagrid. I'm no good at writing Hagrid, so I just kinda summed it up. You'll see why I brought him in later.

Two, I know this isn't that long, but the next chapter will be, and we'll be getting into one of my favorite parts. grins mysteriously

Anyway, thanks for reading, and please continue to review. I love all your comments ;-)

Midnight Star 25

A Christmas of Miracles-Part 1

The next few weeks passed quickly for the kids. The first snowfall came in early December, and that Saturday, all the kids were enjoying snowball fights, snowmen, and snow angels.

An unusual set of pranks were plaguing the school, all attached with the 'Golden Vipers' signature. Between the stresses of school, Quidditch, and the Foundation, Harry actually enjoyed helping the twins pull pranks. It helped hake some stress out of his life, and Merlin knew he had more then his share of that.

But, for the moment, life was good, with everyone in anticipation of the Christmas holidays.

December 15, 1991-24 hours before school lets out

Location: St. Mungos- Long-term care ward

Augusta Longbottom was pacing. She was angry! At whom, she couldn't quite say. Her first instinct was to be angry at those two imbeciles who had given her false hope, who had, once again, used her family as a guinea pig.

She wanted to be angry at the potion itself for not working, or at the healers who administered it. She was angry at the Lestranges for putting her in this position.

She hated her son for being in this position. And most of all, she hated herself. She hated even thinking about hating her son. He was her son, and there was NOTHING she could do for him!

The Healers told her that since starting the potion, brain activity had increased, but beyond that, they couldn't say for sure that it was making any difference.

She decided to go talk to Maria, and put an end to all this nonsense. She walked to the door.

"I'm sorry. I'm so sorry." She murmured, quietly

She turned the handle, but stopped dead in her tracks when she heard a raspy voice ask

"What for?"

She whirled around. Her son, who had been sleeping just a moment ago, was now sitting up in bed.

"Frank?" her voice was barely above a whisper

"I thought you weren't supposed to be sorry, but simply learn from your mistakes." His voice was still raspy, but gaining strength

"Frank?"

"Mum."

She moved towards the bed, as if in a trance, and sat on the bed.

"Frank?"

"Mum."

"Oohh, my baby!" she gasped, gathering him up in big hug, tears streaming down her face

"They told me....they told me" she sobbed

He took her face in his hands, and placed a gentle kiss on her forehead.

"I love you, mum."

"And here I thought I was the love of your life?"

Augusta spun her head!

“Alice?”

“Augusta.” came the soft reply

“Alice.”

“Frank.”

She moved over towards the bed, and sat down next to the duo. Frank placed a gentle kiss on his wife’s lips.

“You will always be the love of my life.”

She kissed him this time. “And you mine.”

“Is...this real?” came the shaky question

The two broke apart. The younger woman put her arms around her mother-in-laws neck, giving her a tight hug.

“Thank you, Augusta.”

Augusta looked at her for a moment, before pulling her into a tighter embrace. Now both women were sobbing heavily.

At that moment, there was a soft knock on the door, before a woman entered.

“Mrs. Longbottom, Maria would...” she stopped “Is everything okay in here?”

“Everything’s fine, Staci.” Frank answered

The woman’s eyes got big.

“M...M...Mr.” she stuttered, before letting the door shut and racing back to the office!

“MARIA! MARIA!” She burst through her boss’s office.

The Healer looked up from the papers she'd been going over.

"Staci, what's wrong?"

"The...the...the"

"Staci, calm down. Deep breath...Okay, now tell me what's wrong."

"The...the Longbottoms!"

"Okay, what..." then her eyes became ovals

"You don't mean..."

Staci nodded.

Without another word, she bolted out the door, and flew down the hall!

She slowly opened the ward door.

"Augusta?" she said softly

"Maria, please come in." but it wasn't Augusta who spoke. It was Frank Longbottom.

"It's a miracle!" she whispered

Several hours later

"Mr. and Mrs. Longbottom...you two...are truly medical miracles."

The current Healer was beside himself. The two Aurors had just been put through 4 hours of rigorous tests and exams.

"The fact that you've retained so much of your memories...even the past 10 years..."

Frank spoke up. "It's...hard to explain. It's like...um...like I was on the...outside looking in. I saw and heard everything that went on. I just didn't have any control over it."

Alice nodded. "Me too. I recognized that time was passing; The people that came in and out...Augusta and...Neville." tears sprung to her eyes, but she went on. "It's like I was screaming in my mind for my body to do certain things, or even say something, but it's like...like the messages wouldn't compute."

The Healer was rapidly making notes on his chart.

"Fascinating." He breathed "How much of your memories have you...um...recovered?"

The couple looked at each other.

"Well...the last few years are the clearest, at least to me..."

Alice nodded in agreement.

"But I remember different parts of my life. A lot of it's fuzzy, but I remember parts of my childhood, Hogwarts, Auror training, that...night."

The room got eerily still.

"Yeah, I remember being in labor, and swearing to Frank that he would never touch me again!"

That lightened the mood, and got the whole room laughing.

"Speaking of your son, has anyone..."

Frank nodded. "My mother went to go pick him up a few minutes ago."

Alice started tearing up again. "Oh, Frank! We've missed so much of his life..." she sobbed, burying her head in his shoulder

He stroked her hair. "It's okay. We'll get through this, as long as we're together."

He placed a soft kiss on her forehead. "We have a second chance. We won't blow it."

She nodded, but continued to sob.

The other people in the room silently moved towards the door, giving the couple some much needed privacy.

Back at Hogwarts

The kids were currently in the Great Hall eating lunch, when a distinguished woman quickly bustled in.

Harry was engrossed in a conversation with Ron and Neville about the latest Quidditch game where Ravenclaw had been slaughtered by Slytherin. They were just getting into some major Slytherin bashing, when someone said Neville's name.

The boys turned around to come face to face with one Augusta Longbottom.

Harry took a good look at her. He had a...talent...for reading people, and he could feel that her magic was...off...sparatic somehow. Her demeanor was one of...excitement, and there was a gleam in her eyes that hadn't been there the last time he'd seen her. His eyes lit up! He knew exactly what had happened, and he was doing everything possible to suppress a grin.

Neville's voice brought him out of his thoughts.

"Gran? What are you doing here?"

"I'm here to pick you up. Now come."

"But school doesn't..."

"I know. Now lets go get your stuff."

"Uh, okay." Said a very confused Neville. "Bye guys, I'll...see you after the holidays. Have a good Christmas."

"Happy Christmas." Harry called, as his grandmother literally pushed him out the door

"What was that all about?" Hermione asked

Harry had used his occlumency exercises, and now bore a mask of indifference. He just shrugged.

"Lucky bloke. Getting out of school, a day early." Ron commented, with a hint of jealousy.

'Oh Ron, if you only knew.' Harry thought

Out of the corner of his eye, he saw his Head of House and infamous Headmaster quickly following the exiting duo.

Out in the Hall

"Augusta!"

"Oh, Minerva. Forgive me. I'm picking up Neville a day early. I hope that won't cause any problems."

The transfiguration teacher wore a look of surprise.

"Of...course not, Augusta. But is everything alright?"

"Yes, everything...everything is extraordinary...I'm sorry, but we do need to go. A Happy Christmas to the both of you."

Without another word, she quickly hustled her grandson up the stairs, and disappeared.

“What was all that about, Albus?”

Albus shook his head. “I truly don’t know Minerva. I truly don’t know.”

10 Minutes later: Back at St. Mungos-Maria Robert’s Office

“Neville! How are you doing today?”

“Uh, fine Mrs. Roberts.” He responded nervously “Uh, Gran, why...”

“Neville...sit down. Something’s...happened.”

Neville’s face fell. “Wh...What?”

Augusta sat in front of him.

“A...a few months ago, two men approached Maria and...myself with...an offer. They...they had a potion that they wanted...they wanted to try on your parents. I was...hesitant, at first...but...after hearing their arguments, I agreed to a trial run. So for the last 3 months, they’ve been on this treatment, then today...” Augusta’s eyes were brimming with tears again.

“Are...are they worse?” Neville asked in a small voice

“WHAT?! NO, No Neville. The potion worked!”

Neville’s face was somewhere between shock and disbelief.

“They...they talked today, Neville, and they recognize us. You and me. They know who we are. They want to see you, Neville.”

“They...they know me?”

His grandmother nodded.

Maria Roberts interjected.

“Neville...the potions working. It’s restoring their memories, but they...don’t have them all back yet. It’ll take the potion another 3 months to fully work, but after that, their minds should be completely restored. Do...do you have any questions?”

Neville just kinda stared at her dumbly, but slightly shook his head.

“Do you think you’re up to seeing them?”

Neville looked unsure for a moment, but then slightly nodded.

“Alright.” She smiled.

Neville felt as if in a daze, as his grandmother led him down the hall. ‘His parents were okay?’ He was told that that was impossible. As they entered the familiar door to his parents room, he couldn’t believe the sight he withheld!

There were his parents...talking...to a couple of Healers! As the trio entered, the talking stopped, and the Healers moved out of the way. For a moment, nothing was said, then his mother stood up from the bed.

“Neville.”

He heard his mother’s voice for the first time. It was soft and gentle like he’d always imagined.

“Neville.”

Hesitantly, he met her eyes.

“Mum?” he asked softly

“Oh, Neville!” she cried softly, throwing her arms around him

Tears were now welling up in Neville’s eyes. He had always dreamed about this. Every time he would come to visit them, he always prayed they would recognize him, but in the last couple of years, he had

given up on that hope. He was afraid this was a dream, and he would wake up at any moment, but...it felt so real.

He looked up. "Mum?"

"Oh, baby." She said gently, wiping the tears from his eyes

"Neville." came another voice

"Dad?"

Frank gave his son a sad smile. "I'm so sorry, Neville."

"I am too, honey. We love you so much."

Neville didn't know what to say, so...he didn't say anything, but a moment later, he found himself in his father's strong embrace.

There weren't words to describe that moment, so he did the only thing that did make sense. Cry.

Now the whole room was in tears. The long separated family, not by distance but by circumstances was finally reunited. Finally.

"Come on Ron. Snap out of it."

Ron slumped. "But Scabbers is gone. I think that stupid cat got him."

"Oh Ron, you didn't have him that long. Wasn't he Percy's rat 'till a few months ago?"

"Well...yeah."

"Well maybe you'll get another pet."

"But..."

“Ronald, it’s the holidays! Let’s enjoy it!” Hermione said in a commanding tone

“Guys, that’s enough. Now come on. I see our rides.”

Harry broke off from the group.

“Uncle Moony!” he cried, throwing his arms around his uncle’s neck

Remus grinned. “Hey kiddo.” He laughed as he pulled his nephew into a tight hug

“Ready for Christmas?” he asked enthusiastically

“Just waitin’ on you.” He chuckled

“Where’s Ms. Karin?”

“Uh, she’s at work...which is where I need to be, so I can take you home and let you get settled in, or Arthur and Molly have offered to let you spend the afternoon at their house.”

Harry thought for a moment. “Umm, could I...go to work with you? I promise not to get in the way.”

Remus looked uncertain. “Uh, Arthur what do you think?”

“Well...I don’t think Richard would mind. Molly’s brought Ginny several times, and considering...who he is...”

Harry rolled his eyes. Arthur had no idea.

“Okay, let’s go get your bags, then we’ll head out.

Harry and Remus apparated back to the Foundation, and made their way to Harry and Fabian’s private floor. Remus knocked on the door.

“Come in.”

“Richard.”

“Ah, Remus. Come in. Did you get your nephew?”

“Uh, yes. That’s actually why I’m here. Would it be alright if he stuck around here this afternoon?”

Harry appeared from behind his uncle, and gave Fabian a slight smirk. Fabian rolled his eyes

“Of course, Remus. That’s fine.”

“Harry, this is my boss, Mr. Lawson. Richard, this is my nephew Harry.”

Harry shook hands. “It’s nice to meet you, Mr. Lawson.”

“And you, Harry...Remus, um, since you have that meeting this afternoon, why don’t I give Harry a tour of the build?”

Remus looked at his watch. “Ooh, I do need to go. Harry...”

Harry nodded enthusiastically. “Thank you, Mr. Lawson. I’d like that.”

“Are you sure?”

“Of course...now go. We’ll be fine. Besides if you’re late, it reflects poorly on me.” He added jokingly

“Thank you. Harry, I’ll be back in a little while. Just stay in my office ‘till my meetings done, okay.”

Harry nodded, and Remus hurried out the door. Only after Harry heard the door click, did he turn back to Fabian.

“A tour?” Harry asked amusedly, an eyebrow raised

“Hey, I had to get you away from him in somehow. You really do have impeccable timing.”

“Oh and why’s that?”

“Because your little ‘miracle potion’ worked.”

Harry chuckled “I gathered that much when an ecstatic Augusta Longbottom showed up yesterday, and practically dragged her grandson out of school. But what does that have to do with my timing?”

“Just this letter I received from our illustrious Madame Roberts.”

Harry scanned over the letter.

“Excited much?”

Fabian chuckled “I’d say that’s an understatement.”

But I don’t understand. The initial contract was very clear on our position. This makes it sound like she’s ready to completely throw us to the wolves that are the press.”

Fabian shook his head “I don’t think she sees it that way. From her point of view, she’d be doing us a favor. Do you know how much business and social standing this kind of publicity would bring into this company?!”

“This company is about people not profit.” Harry said forcefully

Fabian sighed “I know that, Harry. I hope you know that I am not after money. I’m just trying to get you to see this from her point of view. This potion is a Major Medical Breakthrough, and you own the patent to it! That alone is enough to put you in the limelight.”

“I don’t own the patent. Jacob Myers does.”

“Yes, but you cast the ‘dual identity’ charm, as I did. As soon as you break it, everything you’ve ever signed as Jacob Myers will automatically revert to Harry Potter.”

"I know that, but that won't be 'till I'm 17, and in the meantime, I don't want Jacob Myer's name splattered all over the news. That's what you're here for."

"Well thanks." Fabian scoffed "Glad to know I'm not being used."

"Uh, you know what I mean. You're the face of this company. Your identity of Richard Lawson has been established for the last 15 years. My identity has only been established for the last 5 months."

"But I thought you falsified all that paperwork?"

"Exactly, Fabian. Falsified. Which means that if someone looks too closely, they could find some definite holes, and I've gone to too much trouble to make this company legit. I won't have this blown out of the water because some nosy reporter, like Rita Skeeter, decides to stick her nose, or in her case, her wings, where they don't belong."

Fabian looked at him curiously. "Wings?"

Harry shook his head. "Just a bit of blackmail if ever needed."

"Okay, Harry. I'll do my best to keep your name out of it, but what about this meeting that our illustrious Mrs. Roberts is nearly demanding with you?"

Harry sighed "I'd prefer you to go, but, perhaps, I can go and explain just why my name should be kept out of this."

"If you're gonna tell her that you're a time traveler and the Boy-Who-Lived, can I bring my camera?"

Fabian suddenly found himself drenched in ice cold water.

"Hey, no fair!" Fabian shivered

"Turnabout's fair play." Harry leered

"Cheeky brat."

Harry just smirked.

“Do ya mind?”

Harry seemed to think for a moment, only annoying Fabian further, before waving his hand, and reverting Fabian’s clothes to their original state.

“How long is Remus going to be in that meeting?”

“Oh, probably about 2 hours. Why?”

“Because I think we should pop on over to St. Mungos. I doubt I’ll have another chance to show my face as Jacob Myers. Sirius’ trial is on Monday, and I doubt I’ll be out of my guardian’s sight from then on. Especially when Albus gets a hold of the fact that I’m no longer at the Dursleys.”

“You do know they were arrested for child abuse and neglect, right?”

Harry nodded. “Yeah, Karin took my statement, and Elaine Willis testified to my ‘state of mind’.” Fabian snorted “but, I think it was my dear cousin’s testimony that was the final nail in the coffin. The judge wasn’t ‘too’ happy when my cousin testified that Vernon would reward him with sweets and money if he would beat up on me.”

Harry shook his head. “You should have seen the expression on their lawyers face. Vernon got 7 years, and Petunia got 3. Dudley’s in child protective services, but I think it’s them that needs protection from him.”

Fabian chuckled. “It sounds like someone snuck out.”

“Ah, you’ve got to live a little in this life.”

“Yeah. Well, if you really want to drop in unannounced, and get back before Remus gets out of that meeting, we’d better hurry.”

“Alright, let me just go change.”

Using the secret passageway connecting his and Fabian's office, so not to alert Fabian's secretary, quickly changed into his 'adult' body, and clothes.

He and Fabian flooded to St. Mungos, and made their way to the Long-term care unit.

"Mrs. Roberts, thank you for seeing us today. We apologize for coming unannounced."

Maria shook her head. "Not at all, Mr. Myers. Please take a seat. I appreciate you responding so quickly."

"Not a problem, but we need to go over a few things concerning the press."

Fabian and Harry spent the next 45 minutes somewhat explaining their position concerning publicity, and their involvement.

"I'm still having a hard time understanding where you're coming from, Mr. Myers. This type of publicity could do...wonders for your company!"

Fabian gave him a look that distinctly said 'I told you so.'

Harry sighed. "I understand that Mrs. Roberts, and I am not opposed to publicity for the company. I am opposed to publicity focused solely on me. I am a very private person, ma'am. But more importantly, I don't believe that it's right in taking credit for something that isn't my creation. Even though I own the patent for it, I did not invent this potion. . The problem is, it's not simply one person's creation. As I said before, it's been worked on for years by dozens of people in countries all over the world."

"So who can we accredit this to?"

"The best thing would just be to accredit it to the Foundation as a whole, as a...product we produce, but keep the focus on St. Mungos. We're more than willing to let you take the lead on this."

Maria ran her fingers through her hair, and sighed in confusion. “I still don’t completely understand your reasoning behind this, but we’ll try our best to respect your wishes. I’m just afraid it’s not going to be as easy as you hope it will be.”

“Thank you. That’s all we’re asking.”

“Of course. Now, if you would, Augusta Longbottom especially would like to personally thank you.”

Harry glanced at Fabian. “I...really don’t think that’s the best idea. We...this...this wasn’t done for recognition. This was done, because it was the right thing to do. Now, if there’s nothing else, I’m afraid Mr. Lawson and I have another appointment. We appreciate your time, and we’ll be in touch.”

Harry bowed out, followed by a surprised Fabian, and leaving behind a startled Maria Roberts.

Once back at the office.

“Ugh, that woman can’t take a hint, can she?!”

“I’m not sure I understand either.”

Harry sighed. “I don’t want them to see me as a...‘savior’, which is what I’m afraid Augusta Longbottom already sees me as. I’ve had way too much of that for a dozen lifetimes.”

“Well, look, put it out of your mind for now. They’re not going to release anything ‘till after the holidays, and you’ve got enough on your plate with the trial, and the ...uh...Ministry.”

Harry whirled around! “WHAT do you mean, MINISTRY?!”

Fabian grimaced “Yeah...uh...meant to mention that.”

“Fabian...spit it out!”

“Okay...you might want to sit down.”

"I'm fine." Harry huffed

"Okay, remember the Marxton case, with the two kids?"

Harry nodded.

"Well, 3 days ago, they were attacked again, and the aunt we placed them with was...killed defending them."

"WHAT?!"

"We had no reason to believe they would be in any more danger. We also didn't believe this went any higher than Marxton's boss, a man who calls himself, Aries."

"I know who he is." Harry growled "I've worked with him before, and he doesn't murder children!"

"You're right. He doesn't. Lucius Malfoy, on the other hand..."

"WHAT?! UGH!"

"Apparently the kids weren't supposed to be left alive, and certainly not bitten."

"So Greyback defied orders?"

"Noot exactly. More like our team interrupted his...work or fun."

"Ah. And now Lucius is trying to fix it. But why these kids, and why go to all this trouble?"

Fabian shrugged "We haven't figured that part out yet. But guess who's trying to get custody?"

Harry closed his eyes "Please tell me you're kidding."

"I wish I could. Claims to be an old friend of the family and with the aunt now dead..."

“They don’t have any other family?”

“Not that we can locate.”

“Where are they now?”

“Safe House.”

“Good. Keep them there. I won’t be handing them over to Lucius! But how is the Ministry involved?”

“Lucius is calling in a personal favor from the Minister, himself.”

“But the Minister doesn’t handle stuff like this.”

“But he can get the ball rolling.”

Harry growled and rubbed his eyes, before slamming his fists on the table.

“DAMN IT! I wasn’t ready to deal with him yet!”

“Harry...you’ve been anticipating something like this, since you opened this company. How could you not be prepared to deal with it?”

“Uh, he just couldn’t have picked a worst time!”

“Is all this juggling getting to you?”

Harry let out a heavy sigh “I don’t know, Fabian. I just need time to...operate as an adult, and I can’t do that as an 11-year-old kid who’s being watched all the time.”

“Harry...that’s what Griphook and I are here for; to step in when you can’t.”

Harry sighed “I know, and believe me when I say I don’t know what I would do without the two of you, but you also don’t have the same

experience in dealing with these people, and lets just say that I have a personal vendetta against...well...most of them.”

“Harry, you forget that I was a spy, not to mention that I grew up with most of these ‘pureblood bigots’...”

Harry looked amused at Fabian’s choice of words.”

“And ever since I came back to England, I’ve kept an incredibly close eye on them. I, too, have a vendetta. Those BASTARDS killed my brother, and threatened my family! I don’t know who actually performed the curse, but I know which Death Eaters were there, and if I EVER get my hands on them...”

“Macnair.” Harry said softly

“What?”

“Macnair. He performed the curse that killed your brother.”

Fabian looked shocked. “How...how do you know that?!”

Harry sighed “ Remember how I said that I had inherited Tom’s powers in the Final Battle?”

Fabian nodded

“Yeah...well, I also inherited all of his memories.”

“WHAT! And you just FORGOT to mention that little detail?!”

“I hoped it wouldn’t have to be brought up. Look, if you want...justice...for your brother, I can help you get it, but honestly, I wish you would leave this up to me. You know part of my plan, and you roughly know my time frame. If you need to deal with Macnair, personally, for...closure or whatever else, so be it...”

Fabian looked like he was about to interrupt, but Harry stopped him.

“Just know that Justice and Revenge are not dished out easily, and it’s a decision that should not be taken lightly! It...changes you, changes the way you look at life, at...yourself. I want you to seriously consider this, and remember this; there are much worse fates than death, both for you and those who wronged you.”

As Fabian watched Harry during his speech, the one feature that stood out were Harry’s eyes. When he mentioned his ‘plans’ they flashed a dangerously, brilliant green, that he had only witnessed once before, and that was on the day he had initially met him when he had talked about his past.

Fabian looked up. “Th...Thank you, Harry. I’ll let you know.”

Harry nodded “Okay, now, as far as the kids are concerned, nothing should happen ‘till after the holidays. If...for any reason...Malfoy somehow manages to gain guardianship, we’ll take more drastic measures then, whether it’s hiding the kids or what, but for now, I’ll work on having the paper work delayed, and having Lucius set his sights on ‘bigger problems’.”

“Do I want to know?”

Harry shook his head.

Fabian nodded.

“Well, I’d say you’d better ‘change’, and head to your uncle’s office before he misses you. He should be out of that meeting any minute now.”

Harry looked at his watch “Ooh, thanks. Plus, the day’s almost over, and I’m pretty sure we’re meeting Karin for drinks.”

“Uh, Harry...you’re 11.”

Harry rolled his eyes.

“Don’t remind me. Anyway, let me go change, then I’ll go down.

10 minutes later, Harry just barely beat his uncle back to his office.

“Hey Harry, did you get the grand tour?”

Harry looked up from his book. He had forgotten about Fabian’s cover story.

“Yeah, it was great!” he exclaimed, enthusiastically

“It looks like an awesome place to work, and your office is so cool, and your secretary’s really nice!”

Remus reddened at the praise.

Harry knew that Remus needed the encouragement. He had never had much, and the world had been incredibly cruel to him.

“So what are you reading?”

Harry held it up. “Book on Vampires. Required for DADA, but it’s actually pretty cool. Did you know that Vampires don’t generally attack humans out of cruelty, but because of their lack of soul, they don’t see it as wrong? Although they do seem to know a person’s motives, and generally only attack those with evil ones.”

Remus chuckled “You sure are a fountain of knowledge.”

Harry shrugged “I just like to read.”

“Well, your mum would certainly be proud, although your dad would say you’re becoming too much like me.”

Harry grinned “I can handle that. But I don’t think Fred and George will let me go completely ‘bookworm’.”

Remus laughed again.

“So are we still meeting Ms. Karin tonight?”

The next few hours passed quickly, and the evening passed with success. They met Karin for supper at Doreen's, a local restaurant close to Remus' apartment, and then walked around a local park before going back to the apartment. Harry could almost feel the chemistry radiating between Remus and Karin.

He was glad to see his uncle so happy, although he made the mistake of mentioning Sirius' trial once, and Remus' face fell. Harry could tell that Remus had serious doubts about a positive outcome in the trial, but Harry knew better. He had a few surprises for Monday, and with any luck, Sirius would be exonerated and home in less than 72 hours.

Okay, there's the chapter. One of my longer ones. The next one will be to, so it will take me a couple of days to get it up.

Please let me know what you think. I love reading all of your reviews.

Thanks.

Midnight Star 25

A Christmas of Miracles-Part 2

The frigid winter air hit Harry with full force, biting into the warming charm he had cast just moments ago. The night was an unnatural pitch black, heavy clouds obstructing the light of a nearly full moon. The wind whipped the branches of the bare trees creating an eerie crackling.

Harry drew his wand, and tapped out a pattern on, what appeared to be simply, a solid base of a mountain. A moment later, a tiny sliver of light shown through a minuscule crack that seemed to appear out of nowhere. Then a deep voice spoke.

“Énoncer vos affaires.”

“Cerco di effettuare l'equilibrio.”

“Welk saldo?”

“Zwischen den Schatten und dem, der die Schatten ermöglicht.”

The light disappeared, and then a portion of the rock slowly slid away, revealing a hidden doorway, embedded in the mountain. Harry quickly entered as the stone slid back in place. He was met by the sight of four wands pointing directly at his heart. He folded his hands in front of him, and bowed low.

“Mai les messagers soient réussis dans leurs efforts.”

After a tense moment, the four goblins lowered their wands. The leader, whom Harry knew was Saylek from the House of Layben, approached him, and briefly grasped Harry's outstretched hand, connecting their marks. The marks recognized each other from the time they had connected mere months ago, and confirmed to the goblin, that this was indeed their newest member.

“We do not apologize for the precautions, Mr. Potter, but we do welcome you.”

Harry smiled “I wouldn’t expect you to. I’d be disappointed if you did, and I humbly accept your welcome.”

This seemed to please the goblin, but didn’t deter him from the task at hand.

“We received your message, and have all ready made the necessary arrangements. Everything’s a-go.”

“Excellent. And I have here, our main participant.”

He pulled out a small box from his pockets, and reversed the shrinking charm, then lifted the lid, and handed it to Saylek. Inside the small box, lay a ‘stunned’ rat.

“He’s currently in his animagus form. There are also several incredibly powerful memory charms placed on him, and too much...stress could cause them to break.”

The goblins almost looked disappointed.

“But they only need to be in place for the next 10 hours.” He added, innocently.

This seemed to renew the goblin’s spirits.

“I must impress on how...extremely important...the outcome of this mission is; for both our races. If he were to escape...”

The leader held up a hand.

“Not to worry.” Saylek said, seriously “We’re fairly good at what we do.”

At that, Harry smirked. “I know.”

Then he sighed “I suppose I’m just paranoid.”

“Understandable. Now, are there any additional instructions?”

“Yes.” He pulled out a single envelope, and handed it over.

“Make sure she gets this, and emphasize just how important it is to follow these instructions to the letter.”

The goblin nodded, as he carefully pocketed the letter.

Other than that, there’s nothing else, but if there are any problems, contact me immediately, otherwise, I’ll come back at the date and time I’ve already given you.”

“Very good.”

Harry recognized that the meeting was over. He bowed low.

“La buona fortuna e li ringrazia.”

The goblin bowed back. “Mei alles gaat zoals gepland.”

“Wie vorgesehen.”

With that final word, Harry gave one final bow, and with a nearly silent ‘pop’, apparated away.

Sirius’ POV

Sirius moaned. It was too early for this. The Dementors were on the move again. He thought about changing into his animagus form, but a loud banging on the door stopped him.

Sirius thought he was hallucinating, when 6 people appeared in his cell. On closer inspection, Sirius could see that they were Aurors.

“Come on, Black!” one of them barked harshly “Lets go!”

Sirius was confused “Go where?” he managed

“Ministry.” Growled another, aiming his wand

A third rolled a vile over to him with a blue substance in it.

“Drink it all!” came the order

Sirius eyed it suspiciously.

“What is it?”

“None of your business!” snapped the first, obviously the leader

“No.” he said simply, putting the potion back down

“Look, Black! We’ve been ordered to bring you in through any means necessary. Now, either you take the potion, or we do this the hard way.”

“Personally, I’d prefer the latter.” Another one spat

“Can it, Samuels!” the leader spat back

“Well, Black?!”

Sirius sighed, and weighed his options. If this was a plot to kill him, well...who cared? He didn’t. He had lived in this hellhole for the last 10 years. No one cared whether he lived or died. No one would miss him if this was a plot to kill him.

He picked up the vile, and uncorked it. He subtly sniffed it. He didn’t think he detected any poisons, but he couldn’t be sure.

He downed the potion in one gulp. The effects were almost instantaneous. He was light headed, and felt dizzy, before his world went completely black.

Sirius woke up, what seemed like just a few moments later. His head was resting on a hard wood table, and he was cuffed to a cold hard chair. He tried to lift his head, but immediately lay it back down. He

was groggy, and his head felt like a lead weight. Suddenly, a voice interrupted his thoughts.

“How are you feeling, Mr. Black?”

Sirius slowly opened his eyes. “Like I was hit with a ton of bricks.” he groaned

The voice chuckled. “I can imagine. That numbing potion packs quite a punch. Don’t worry. You’ve just been given the antidote. Your head should start to clear in the next few minutes.”

Sirius tried lifting it again. Indeed, it was clearing.

“Ugh. How long have I been out?”

“About a hour.” she answered

“Who are you? And why am I here?”

The woman, who was now coming into focus, was frowning.

“They didn’t tell you?”

“Tell me what?” Sirius asked suspiciously

The woman sighed. “My name is Karin McAlistor, although you may remember me as Karin Parkinson. I was a few years behind you in school, and my brother was a year ahead of you. As purebloods, our families knew each other socially.”

Sirius nodded, but didn’t say anything.

“Anyway, I’d like you to go into that room. There’s a change of clothes, new robes, and...try to do something with that hair.”

She pulled out her wand, flicked it towards Sirius’ restraints, which promptly fell off, then she sat the wand down on the table.

Sirius looked up, extremely confused.

"I...don't understand." He asked quietly

"Well, as your lawyer, I do not want the Wizengamot's first impression of you to be based on that appearance."

"Wiz...Wizengamot? Lawyer?"

"Yes, Mr. Black. I'm sure you're not completely unfamiliar with the concepts."

"I don't understand."

"You've already stated that Mr. Black, and if you truly don't know why you're here, then I'm afraid my clients are mistaken, and I'm wasting my time. Now, if you want to prove that you are not a Death Eater, were not the Potter's secret keeper, nor responsible for the murders you're accused of, say so right now, and I'll leave you to the mercies, or the lack thereof, of the Dementors!" she ended forcefully

"How...I...It...It was my fault. I suggested..." Sirius' voice was broken

"I was told you would say something along those lines. I've gotten some of the facts, Mr. Black, and I assure you, that the only thing you're at fault for is being in the wrong place at the wrong time. The guilty party in this case is one Mr. Peter Pettigrew! You are merely a victim of circumstance, and I'm here to prove it. Now, I suggest you go change. We're in court in half-an-hour."

Sirius didn't move. Instead he asked. "Who are 'your clients'?"

"What?"

"You said 'then my clients are mistaken'."

"Oh. The two individuals who retained my services. They're the ones who produced evidence proclaiming your innocence."

"But who..."

“I’m afraid you’ll have to wait. They asked me not to reveal their identities till we’re in court. Now please, we’re down to 25 minutes, and I still need to brief you on a few things.”

Sirius stood up, but didn’t take the wand.

“Take it.” Karin ordered “I don’t believe you’re going to try and use it to escape or take me hostage. You’re smarter than that, plus I have a greater confidence in you, than most of the idiots I usually defend, if only for the reason that my clients have such a strong faith in you, and their belief that you’re innocent.”

Sirius’ head was spinning. ‘Someone had faith in him?’ ‘Someone knew he was innocent?’ He couldn’t fathom who.

He gingerly picked up the wand. He closed his eyes, as he felt the magic flow through him for the first time in over 10 years. The wand was far from a match, but the feeling was still...intoxicating.

He moved to the room, and found a set of robes. On closer inspection, he could see that they were of highest quality. This only confused him further.

30 minutes later

Aurors surrounded Karin and Sirius, escorting them into the courtroom. The courtroom was huge! The entire Wizengamot was there, with 3 head figures in the front row. Madame Amelia Bones sat in the middle, with Minister Fudge on the right, and Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot, Albus Dumbledore, on the left.

There was a lot of talking as they took their seats.

“ORDER! Order in the court!” rang out Fudge’s voice

The entire room slowly quieted down.

“Now, we’re here today, because...it’s been brought to our...attention...that, under the law, that...no prisoner can be held for longer than 6 months without being tried under Veritaserem, which was...accidentally...overlooked...in the case of Mr. Sirius Black. We’re here today to enforce that law.”

“ACTUALLY, Minister!” Karin spoke up “We’re here to do much more than that today!” her voice was all business, and one that demanded respect

“And you are...?”

“Karin McAlistor, Minister, here for the defense. But before we go any further, I request that you remove these illustrious Aurors from around my work space!”

Fudge actually had the audacity to look amused. “I’m afraid...Ms. McAlistor, that they are only doing their duty, and guarding a highly dangerous criminal and murderer.”

Karin was unfazed by this. “Minister, there are already a number of protection and confining charms around Mr. Black. He’s not going anywhere, and he’s not a threat to anyone in this courtroom. Now, either you remove your ‘goons’...” several gasps could be heard around the room “...or I will have them arrested and charged with unprovoked harassment, as well as deliberate hindrance in the proceedings of the law and this court!”

At this, Cornelius looked startled, as did several of the members of the Wizengamot and the public.

Dumbledore spoke up. “Minister, I believe, under the circumstances, we can accommodate Ms. McAlistor’s request...As long as they wait just outside.”

Fudge muttered something under his breath, but reluctantly signaled the group of Aurors to wait outside.

Sirius had only known this woman for a few minutes, and he was already impressed.

“Thank you, Master Warlock. Now, as to my original statement, we are not simply here to try Mr. Black under truth serum, which, most of you, undoubtedly believe as a complete waste of time, BUT I am here to prove to you, beyond a shadow of a doubt that Mr. Black is INNOCENT of ALL crimes of which he is charged!”

With that declaration, the whole crowd erupted! It took several loud ‘claps’ from Dumbledore’s wand to regain order. Surprisingly, Amelia was the first to speak.

“That’s an extremely bold claim, Ms. McAlister. May I ask what led you to this conclusion?”

“Evidence, Madame Bones. Produced by my clients in order to secure Mr. Black’s release.”

“And where are these so called ‘clients’?” sneered Fudge

“They’ll be here momentarily, Minister.” Karin answered calmly

“Just who are they?” Fudge demanded

Karin smiled “Here they are now. Mr. Remus Lupin and Mr. Harry Potter.”

At that moment, Remus and Harry walked calmly through the doors, both wearing masks of neutrality, displaying no emotions.

For a split second, the hall was stunned into silence, before all hell broke loose. The crowd erupted again! The Wizengamot was up in arms, and Sirius spun around in shock! Standing there were two people he never thought he’d see again.

Harry walked calmly beside Remus. He took a quick evaluation of the surroundings. The crowd was an interesting mix, although the one person that stood out to him was Lucius Malfoy. He always was a nosy, evil git. Just seeing him again made Harry want to hex the bastard into next week, although Lucius looked ready to do the same.

Harry moved on to the main panel. Amelia was the only one he was glad to see. She currently wore a look of shock, but Harry knew that she would be fair. With Fudge, he would prefer to see that incompetent idiot thrown out on that ridiculous bowler. How he ever got elected, was still a mystery to Harry. Dumbledore, on the other hand, was looking somewhere between shocked and horrified, and his face had gone pale, a fact that Harry couldn't help but feel a bit pleased at.

His eyes finally fell on Sirius. He could see the confusion in his Godfather's eyes. He gave him a small smile, before reverting back to his mask of neutrality.

He and Remus made their way up the aisle, and sat down, right behind Karin and Sirius.

Amelia finally realized that order needed to be restored, once again. A streak of lightning, followed by a loud 'BANG' silenced the hall.

Fudge was the first to shoot off his mouth.

"THIS...THIS..." he sputtered "THE BOY...The Boy can't be here!"

"And why would that be, Minister?" Karin asked calmly

"He's...he's...There's no children allowed in these type of proceedings!"

"I'm afraid you'll find no law that states anything of the sort. And, in point of fact, Mr. Potter has every right to be here. Not only is the only remaining 'victim' of the crimes of which Mr. Black is accused of, but he also asked me to mention that he is here in a family capacity as a godson supporting his godfather."

A 'lul' fell over the crowd.

Sirius was stunned, but he felt something. The first twinge of hope in over 10 years, yet for what, he wasn't quite sure.

"Now, if there are no more objections, I think we should proceed."

“Of...of course, Ms. McAlistor. Now, you say you have evidence that Mr. Black was not the Potter’s Secret Keeper?”

“That’s correct. Aside from Mr. Black’s testimony, which is why we’re here in the first place, I submit two letters. Both having been tested and verified by Ministry officials that they were both written and magically sealed by Mr. James Potter and Mrs. Lily Evans-Potter, between the months of August and October in the year of 1981, anywhere between mere months or even days of their deaths.”

She handed the letters to a court courier, who promptly handed them to Madame Bones. They slowly got passed around.

“As you can see, the letters are directly addressed to Mr. Potter and Mr. Lupin. Both clearly state that they were not going to use Mr. Black as their Secret Keeper, but had decided to switch to one Mr. Peter Pettigrew.”

“PETER PETTIGREW is DEAD because of this man here!” spewed Fudge

Karin’s composure never faltered.

“I’m afraid that’s not true, Minister.”

“Ms. McAlistor...Karin...I admit that the letters are compelling, and they certainly put a new view on this case, but we can’t solely base our decision solely on the written word. Plans change all the time.”

“I understand that, Madame Bones. I’m not asking you to. I would like to call a witness, and I request this witness be placed under veritaserum as well.”

Dumbledore, who had finally found his voice, spoke up.

“That’s highly unusual for a simple witness, Ms. McAlistor.”

“I’m afraid there’s nothing simple about this witness, Master Warlock, and truth serum is necessary.”

“Who is this witness, Ms. McAlister?”

Unnoticed by everyone, but Harry, Karin discretely reached into her pocket, and activated a small object.

“Ladies and Gentlemen, Members of the Wizengamot, May I present the infamous, and very much alive...Mr. Peter Pettigrew.”

At that, the doors flew open, and a struggling, whimpering Pettigrew was being dragged in by 4 goblins. Several gasps could be heard throughout the room, as the goblins dragged the pathetic little man, conjured a hard metal chair, and used several charms to secure him to it.

But Harry wasn't focused on the rat. He was focused on his uncle and godfather. As soon as Sirius and Remus had recognized Peter, both of them jumped, and both wore looks of horror that said they were more than 'ready to kill'!

The spells surrounding Sirius were the only things holding him back.

Remus, on the other hand, had already reached for his wand, but Harry was faster, thanks to his years of Quidditch and dueling.

He grabbed his arm! “No!” he whispered “Not now.” He added gently

Remus' expression didn't change, but he reluctantly lowered his wand. When Harry was sure his uncle wouldn't try anything, at least for the moment, he turned his attention back to Pettigrew. The rat was whimpering, and kept muttering 'all wrong' and 'big mistake'.

“This is a TRICK!” shouted Fudge “Pettigrew is dead!”

“I assure you, Minister. This is Peter Pettigrew. He's been in hiding for the last 10 years.”

Karin was on her feet. “If you'll notice, Mr. Pettigrew is missing a finger. The very finger that he himself cut off, to make it look like my client murdered him!”

She signaled to one of the goblins. "ALSO, if you lift his sleeve, you'll find the Dark Mark!"

Many gasps of horror and hisses could be heard throughout the room, as the ugly mark was revealed.

"I believe, under the circumstances, veritaserum is a more than reasonable request."

Albus, who wore a startled expression, answered.

"Very well, Ms. McAlister."

He signaled to the court courier. As the courier approached, Peter let out a wail.

"Noo! Noo. This is a mistake! I'm innocent!"

"We'll see, Mr. Pettigrew. We'll see." Albus answered gravely

Once the drops were administered, Peter's eyes became foggy, and he fell silent.

"Alright Ms. McAlister, you may begin your questioning."

"Thank you, Madame Bones."

She walked over to the subdued man.

"Please state your name for the court."

In a lifeless voice, he answered. "Peter Michael Petigrew."

"When were you born?"

"May 12, 1960."

"Who were your parents?"

“Nicholas and Laura Pettigrew.”

“Are you a Death Eater?”

“Yes.”

Gasps could be heard around the room.

“When did you become a Death Eater?”

“I took my mark right after I graduated from Hogwarts, but I spied on Dumbledore since my 6th year.”

More gasps of horror could be heard, and Harry saw Sirius and Remus nearly leap from their seats! Even Dumbledore had gone pale.

“YOU TRAITEROUS BASTARD!” Sirius screamed

“Ms. McAlister, restrain your client!” Fudge demanded

Karin quickly walked over to Sirius and whispered something in his ear, before walking back over to Pettigrew. Harry could see that Sirius was still ready to kill, given half a chance, but he sat back down.

“Mr. Pettigrew, why did you become a Death Eater?”

“Because I wanted to.”

“How did you spy on Albus Dumbledore?”

“I’m a rat animagus. I would sneak into his office.”

More ‘gasps’.

“And the Dark Lord helped you gain this...ability?”

“Yes, in my 5th year.”

Harry saw Remus’ eyes go big, and Sirius’ fist clench.

“Were you the Potter’s Secret Keeper?”

“Yes.”

“And did you tell the Dark Lord where they were?”

“Yes.”

“Did Mr. Black realize that you had betrayed the Potters?”

“Yes.”

“Did he come after you?”

“Yes. He cornered me on the street.”

“And what happened after that?”

“I knew I had to get away. I had my wand behind my back. I thought if I made it look like Sirius killed me, no one would believe him when he said that I was the Secret Keeper. I screamed at him, asking him why he had betrayed Lily and James. Then I blew up the street. I think it knocked Sirius unconscious. I used a cutting hex on my finger, transformed into a rat, and escaped into the sewers.”

“And where have you been hiding these last 10 years?”

“All over. I moved around as a rat.”

“Do you regret becoming a Death Eater?”

“Yes.”

Harry could see a hopeful gleam in Albus’ eye, before being quickly extinguished by Karin’s next question.

“Why do you regret it?”

“Because the most powerful wizard in the world fell to the Potter brat.”

Both Sirius' and Remus' eyes were murderous.

"And to your knowledge, was Mr. Black ever a Death Eater or ever associated with them in any way?"

"No."

"Thank you. No more questions."

The entire Wizengamot and crowd broke out in chatter.

"Order! Order!" called out Fudge

Amelia spoke up.

"Well, I think it's obvious that Mr. Pettigrew is the guilty party here. I call for a vote."

"I second that!" called out another member

"Very well. All those in favor of a life sentence in Azkaban."

Only two hands shot up.

Amelia sighed "All those in favor of a Dementor's Kiss."

Almost all the hands shot up, and even a few of audience members threw in their two cents.

Amelia looked grave, but continued. "Very well."

By this point, Peter had been given the antidote, and was whimpering again.

"Peter Pettigrew, you are hereby charged and found guilty of bearing the Dark Mark, operating as a Death Eater, and becoming an illegal animagus. You are also charged as an accomplice in the murders of Lily and James Potter, as well as the direct murder of 13 muggles, and the framing of Mr. Sirius Black. For these crimes, you shall receive the Dementor's Kiss."

Peter was whimpering again, and looked as if he were trying everything to transform right there.

Amelia continued. "As for Mr. Black..."

"Madame Bones" Karin interrupted

"Yes?"

"My client requests that he also be placed under Veritaserum, just so there's no doubt in anyone's mind."

Amelia looked hesitant, but then agreed.

"Very well, Ms. McAlister."

After the drops were administered, Karin began her questioning.

"Please state your name."

"Sirius Orion Black."

"And your Birthday?"

"March 5, 1960."

"Are you a Death Eater, Mr. Black?"

"No."

"Have you ever been one?"

"No."

"Do you have any sympathies towards the Death Eaters or the Dark Lord?"

"Never." His voice was still monotone, but you could almost hear the bite behind it.

“Were you the Potter’s Secret Keeper?”

“No.”

“Why not?”

“Everyone expected me to be. I was afraid I would be too obvious.”

“So you switched with Mr. Pettigrew, correct?”

“Yes. We didn’t believe that anyone would suspect him. I wanted them to come after me, instead of the real secret keeper.”

“Mr. Black, would it be fair to say that you would have died to protect the Potters?”

“Yes. They were my family. I would never betray them.”

“Are you responsible for the spell that blew up the street, and killed 13 muggles?”

“No.”

“Do you know who is?”

“Peter Pettigrew.”

“Did you kill Peter Pettigrew?”

“No. He escaped.”

“Thank you, Mr. Black. No more questions.”

Amelia nodded to the bailiff to administer the antidote.

“Alright, all those in favor of clearing Mr. Black of all charges?”

Almost every hand went up.

“Mr. Black, the court finds that you have been falsely accused, and are hereby cleared of all charges. All of your rights are reinstated, as a citizen of the United Kingdom, the Wizarding Community, and the House of Black. All of the Black Family properties and vaults will be signed back over in your name, as well as all of the stocks and holdings.”

Karin interrupted. “Madame Bones, Mr. Potter has requested that his godfather also be granted joint guardianship, of himself, in conjunction with his current guardian, Mr. Remus Lupin, in accordance to his parent’s original wishes, as stated in their will, that Mr. Black be named guardian.”

Harry could see the looks of surprise on Remus’ and Sirius’ face, but the one that pleased him the most was the look of pure shock on Dumbledore’s face. It looked like the old codger was about to interrupt, but Amelia beat him to it.

Amelia was overwhelmed, and neither she, nor the Ministry were in any position to refuse nearly any request submitted here.

She sighed heavily. “Very well, Ms. McAlister. Mr. Black is hereby granted joint guardianship of Mr. Harry James Potter, in conjunction with Mr. Remus Lupin. I trust they can work out the living arrangements. In addition, the Ministry will issue a formal apology and official statement clearing Mr. Black’s name, as well as a sum of 500,000 galleons for unjustified pain and suffering. Mr. Black, you have this court’s sincerest apologies for these horrible circumstances. I hope that you can, at least, try to regain some of what you have lost, and on a personal note, if you decide to sue the Ministry, I will support you 100 percent.”

Several gasps were heard at that statement, but Harry could swear that a faint smile crossed Sirius’ lips.

Amelia brought down her gavel. “This Court is adjourned.”

Sirius was in a daze. ‘Was that really it?!’ ‘Was he free? After 10 years? Just like that?!’

He barely noticed the crowd, as they were slowly moving around, talking about what had just happened. He slowly turned around.

Harry took the initiative. He stood up on the bench, and flung his arms around his godfather. As much as he tried, silent tears still streamed down his face.

"I'm sorry." he uttered, just barely above a whisper. He knew Sirius wouldn't understand 'why' he was sorry, but he didn't care. Harry just clung to him, as if for dear life.

He only released him when Remus stepped up, and put a hand on his shoulder.

For a long moment, the two old friends just looked at each other. Remus finally spoke.

"I'm...I'm so sorry. I should have known you were telling the truth." His voice was filled with guilt and remorse.

Sirius sighed. "I never should have doubted your loyalty." His tone pretty much matched Remus'

"I...uh...We both made some big mistakes."

Sirius just looked at his old friend. "Yeah." He whispered, in agreement

In a much needed reunion, the two friends embraced as brothers. When they eventually broke apart, tears could be seen in both men's eyes.

"I keep thinking I'm going to wake up at any moment."

"I assure you, Mr. Black. This is very real."

Sirius turned around. "Ms. McAlister, I...I..."

Karin smiled. "It was my pleasure, Mr. Black. I'm truly sorry you found yourself in this situation in the first place."

“As am I, Mr. Black.”

“Aunt Lia.” exclaimed Karin, giving the older woman a hug

“You’re related?” Harry asked, surprised

“Yeah. Amelia is my mum’s sister.”

“Mr. Black, you have my deepest sympathies for everything you’ve endured these past 10 years.”

Sirius nodded stiffly. “Thank you, Madame Bones.”

“Let me know if there’s anything I can do to help. Karin, I’ll owl the necessary papers to your office this afternoon, and the official apology and will be in tomorrow’s Prophet, as well as Mr. Pettigrew’s conviction. I’m sorry, I need to go and deal with the press. Excuse me.”

As she walked away, Harry piped up.

“Can we give him the box now?”

Sirius looked confused, but Remus nodded. Harry grinned, as he held up a long thin wooden box. As Harry lifted the lid, he saw something else he never thought he’d see again. His 10 ½” Oak wood, Dragon Heartstring wand. He gingerly picked it up, letting the magic wash over him, and allowing the wand to reconnect to his core. He sighed contentedly. Harry chuckled. That seemed to make him realize just who was in front of him.

“Harry, I...” his voice faltered

“I love you too, Padfoot. That’ll never change.”

Sirius was currently resembling a fish.

Harry chuckled again.

“Uh...how...”

“Hey, someone had to warn me about you.” Harry smirked

Remus and Karin chuckled at the boys antics.

“Remus, I’ll bring over the necessary paperwork tomorrow.”

“Karin...I don’t know how to begin to thank you.”

“Oh...I can think of a few ways, plus, now, you’ve got a babysitter.”
She teased, playfully

Remus chuckled, and placed a gentle kiss on her lips.

“Um, it’s a start.”

At that, there was a double sound of ‘Ewww.’

“Hey, no comments from the peanut gallery.”

Sirius gave him an innocent look.

“Who...us?”

“We would never do anything like that, Uncle Moony.”

“Uh hu?”

Harry smirked, before getting serious.

“Um, as ‘interesting’ as this place is, I’d really prefer not to stick around all day. Can we go home?”

Remus smiled. “Yeah. Karin can you join us for a bit?”

“Oh, I wish I could, but I need to go ahead and deal with all this, plus, I think the three of you need to spend some time together. Make up for lost time. Oh, and don’t even think about going into work tomorrow.

Richard's already given you the day off, and he told me to make sure you took it!" once again, her voice took a commanding tone

Remus raised his hands in mock surrender. "Yes Ma'am." He saluted

She hit his arm, playfully.

"Watch it! Mr. Black, I'm glad everything went as well as it did. Harry, I'm glad you got the outcome you wanted. I'll see you all tomorrow."

She gave Remus one final kiss, before disappearing into the crowd.

"Boy, she's something else."

"Yes she is." Remus agreed "So, are you ready to blow this joint?"

"I...I never believed I'd get out of Azkaban." His voice was hard, and his eyes held that haunted look that Harry knew all too well.

"Let's go home, and we'll take things from there."

"Home...but..."

"We've got your room set up, and Christmas is in a few days. Uncle Moony said we could go Christmas shopping tomorrow!" Harry interjected, with a true childlike enthusiasm "We might even go down to Hogsmeade, and...!"

"Harry, I think Sirius has had enough excitement for one day. Let's talk about it later."

Harry nodded, before grabbing his godfather's hand, and starting to pull him towards the doors.

As the three of them were taking the long way through the Ministry, as to avoid the press, a sudden voice stopped them, much to Harry's dismay. He was hoping this could've at least been put off for a day or two.

“Remus! Harry! I would like to speak to you.” the voice was grim, and as the man approached, Harry could see the lack of twinkle in his eyes

“Professor Dumbledore.” Harry said calmly

“Albus.” came Remus’ hard tone

“Remus, I really need to speak with you about Harry.”

“I think you’ve had enough say when it comes to Harry!” Remus growled

“How long ago did you gain guardianship?” came the breathless question

“When I was FINALLY allowed to meet him at the end of the summer!” he bit out “NOT that it’s any of your concern!”

A look of relief crossed over Albus’ face, one that only Harry understood the meaning to. He hadn’t been away from Privet Drive that long, and those useless Blood wards would go back up if he returned by that next summer.

“Remus, I urge you to let him return to his relatives. He’s truly safest there.” His voice held a note of urgency

“SAFE?!” Remus almost screamed

“You think he’s SAFE there!? Do you even KNOW where his ‘relatives’ are!? Hmm?! They’re in PRISON, Albus, for child abuse and neglect, and let me tell you, it wasn’t because they did anything to that own little BRAT of theirs!”

Harry had never seen Remus so riled, and he could see that Sirius was having trouble believing it as well, although he could also see that Sirius was starting to put the pieces together, as to why Remus was so angry.

“I SWEAR, ALBUS! If you EVER try to take Harry away, or place him with those HORRID people ever again, Voldemort will seem like a WALK IN THE PARK!”

With that, he grabbed Harry, and a stunned Sirius, pulled them to an apparation point, and without a second thought, apparated the three of them straight to his flat.

For a moment, there was an uncomfortable silence, then Harry threw his arms around his Uncle’s waist.

“Thank you, Uncle Moony.” Then changing the subject “Come on, Padfoot. Your room’s this way.”

Later that evening

“I don’t know, Moony. This day has been so...surreal.”

“You’ll get no argument here. Want a drink?”

“Whatcha got?”

“Um, I’ve got Muggle Jack Daniel, Tequila,...”

“Moony, I haven’t had a drink in 10 years.”

“Right....Sorry...Okay, Fire Whiskey, Veela Wine, Dragon Flame, Li...”

“WAIT, how did you get Dragon Flame?!”

Remus chuckled, and pulled out a bottle.

“Perk of the job.”

Unless things have changed in the last 10 years, isn’t that stuff, like really expensive, hard to come by, and only made by Vampires?”

“Yep.” Remus smirked “Want a taste?”

Sirius gave him a look that said ‘Hand it over or die’.

Remus chuckled “I’ll take that as a ‘yes’.”

“I want to know what you do for a living. Did the bookworm werewolf decide to revert to his darker side?”

Remus laughed “Hardly. Although a lot of our contacts are uh...savory characters.”

“What kind of company do you work for?”

“Actually a legitimate one, but we’re not allowed to talk about anything that isn’t public knowledge.”

Sirius raised a curious eyebrow, and gave Remus a questioning look.

Remus handed Sirius a whisky glass, with a dark liquid that appeared to be almost sizzling. Both men took a sip.

“WHOA...that stuff is...wow!”

“My thought’s exactly.”

“So, legitimate, yet secretive?”

“Something like that...but I don’t think my work is what you want to talk about.”

At these words, Sirius’ face went hard.

“Where was he?” Sirius’ voice was beyond rigid, and hatred was shining in his eyes

Remus shook his head “I don’t know. I had no idea that he’d even been found, and I didn’t think it was the best time to ask Karin after the trial, but I swear Sirius, if I had, he would’ve been dead before he entered that courtroom!” Remus’ face now matched Sirius’

“Do you think it’s true...everything he said?”

Remus shook his head “I don’t want to believe he betrayed us for that long, but...I mean...were we that blind?”

Sirius took another drink “I keep going back to our 5th year. We’d worked all summer on the Animagus research. James and I had figured it out right before Halloween, but Peter just couldn’t get it. Then the Christmas holidays come, and when we came back, Peter could just ‘miraculously’ transform. I thought he had just practiced what we told him, but...”

“You really think Voldemort had a hand in that?”

“I don’t know...and all that stuff about spying on Albus...”

Remus involuntarily jerked at the name.

“Moony...what was that today...at the Ministry?”

Remus’ face went from angry to murderous.

“I...DESPISE that man, Sirius, despite everything he’s done for me!”

Sirius now wore a solemn expression. “Tell me everything.”

By the time Remus was finished with his story, Sirius was looking murderous, as well.

“They abused him, Sirius. He would never admit it to me, but I saw the report...and the pictures. There was this huge bruise on his back...” Remus’ voice faltered for a moment “They beat him, he slept in a cupboard, they would lock him in there, and starve him...” Remus was now on his feet, pacing heavily

“I don’t know WHAT Albus was thinking, Sirius, I just...”

“You did the right thing, Remus.”

“If I’d done the right thing, I would have gotten him out of there years ago.” Remus stopped pacing “I would’ve gotten you out of there years ago.”

The two friends were calmer now, and Remus sat back down.

“Moony...It’s over and done with. I’m out of Azkaban, and Harry’s safe. We’ll protect him...together...just like we promised James.”

Remus looked up, wearing a defeated smile.

“It’s good to have you back, Padfoot.”

“The feeling’s mutual, Moony. The feeling’s mutual.”

The two men tapped their glasses, before downing the last of the contents.

Conversation Translated:

French: Énoncer vos affaires.”--State your business.-voice

Italian: Cerco di effettuare l'equilibrio.--I seek to maintain the balance.-Harry

Dutch: Welk saldo?--Which balance?-voice

German: Zwischen den Schatten und dem, der die Schatten ermöglicht.--Between the shadows and that which makes the shadows possible.-Harry

French-Mai les messagers soient réussis dans leurs efforts.--May the Messengers be successful in their endeavors. -Harry

Italian-“La buona fortuna e li ringrazia.”--Good luck and thank you.-Harry

Dutch- Mei alles gaat zoals gepland.--May everything go as planned.-
Saylek

German- Wie vorgesehen.--As planned.-Harry

Okay, I hope you liked that. A few notes. I know that the trial was a bit too muggle, but once I wrote it, I liked the way it turned out. As far as who was in charge of the trial. I know that Albus, probably, should have been in charge, but that wouldn't have worked, because he never would have granted the guardianship request, plus he doesn't directly represent the Ministry, so I had Amelia in charge. I don't think it was too much of a believable stretch.

Also a note on the goblins. I know that goblin's aren't supposed to have wands, but uh, well...the bad guys don't play by the rules, so how can the guys combating them be expected to?

Anyway, as I said above, it will probably take me a few weeks to get the next one out, due to school, but I will try to get it out as quickly as possible.

Thanks for reading.

Midnight Star 25

A Christmas of Miracles-Part 2 continued

Harry awoke at 3 that morning, prepared to get a short workout in, before the rest of the house awoke. He knew it was a risk, but he also knew that both of his guardians had just gone to bed. He placed security spells on his doors, to alert him if anyone opened it, and a combination, transfiguration and illusion charm to make it appear that he was still in bed.

After a 3 hour workout in the park, Harry bought a copy of the Daily Prophet from a newspaper stand. (A/N: remember, Remus lives in Magical London) Harry grinned, as he read the Headline. The real story had actually gotten printed, although he thought it might have had something to do with a mysterious dark figure threaten a certain 'bug'. He paid for the paper, then apparated directly to his room. He canceled out the charms, before making his way to the kitchen to start breakfast.

An hour later, there was a knock. Harry took the eggs off the stove, before he went to open the door.

"K...Ms. Karin." Remembering his current status

"Good morning, Harry." She was casually dressed, but very attractively, and wore a genuine smile

"Good morning."

"Is Remus awake?"

"Not yet, but I just put on the bacon and sausage. I expect their sense of smell to bring them in momentarily."

Karin looked surprised. "You cook?"

Harry shrugged "It's about the only useful thing I learned at the Dursley's. Aunt Petunia had me up every morning cooking breakfast, and always had me help with the other meals." He knew the sympathy card was a bit of a low blow, but it was true, and by Karin's expression, it was working.

“Oh...well, I just wanted to drop off these papers...”

“Why don’t you join us for breakfast?”

“I, uh...I don’t want to intrude.”

“No intrusion. There’s plenty of food. Plus, if the bacon doesn’t work, I’ll be forced to resort to more drastic measures, and I’m pretty sure he’d prefer your methods over mine, since mine involve ice water and jumping on the bed.”

“Then I guess you’d better be glad the bacon worked, because, otherwise you’d be looking at a two week grounding.” Came a stern voice

Harry just smirked “Morning, Uncle Moony. Ms. Karin was just about to come wake you up.”

Karin moved inside, as Harry shut the door. Karin moved over, and gave Remus a passionate kiss.

“Hmm, I would have stayed in bed, if I’d known that was coming.”

At that moment, Sirius came in, rubbing his eyes.

“Moony, do you have to subject us to that this early in the morning?”

Harry gave his godfather a big hug.

“Morning, Padfoot. Breakfast is just about on the table. I think we have reason to celebrate.”

He thrust the Prophet into Sirius’ hand, before racing back into the kitchen.

Remus raised an eyebrow “He cooked?”

Karin shrugged “He cooked.”

“Have you seen the Prophet yet?”

Karin nodded “Its good news. I was afraid they would skew the story, but...”

“Sirius?”

Sirius handed over the paper, a look of pure relief and shock washing over his face.

“I can’t believe it.” Sirius muttered “I just can’t believe it.”

“Well, for once, the Prophet portrayed a fairly accurate picture, which is a true miracle in itself.”

Remus read over the article. After a minute, he finally set it down.

“Karin, I don’t know how...”

She silenced him with a kiss, wrapping her arms around his neck. Harry was watching from around the corner, a big smile crossing his face. This was the way things were supposed to be. His godfather free, his uncle happy...his family safe, and he would do his best to make sure it stayed that way.

He decided to give Sirius a break from rolling his eyes at the couple’s antics. He popped his head out.

“Guys, breakfast. Come on. It’s getting cold.”

The adults chuckled, but moved into the kitchen, the Prophet lay forgotten.

It read...

A huge picture of a whimpering Pettigrew struggling against the guards with his Dark Mark clearly visible.

SIRIUS BLACK INNOCENT IN POTTER’S MURDER

PETIGREW GUILTY PARTY

By Rita Skeeter

In what started out as a simple formality of trying an already convicted murderer under Veritaserum, turned into uncovering one of the biggest cases of wrongful conviction on the part of the Ministry. Ten years ago, Mr. Sirius Black was convicted and sent to Azkaban, for the belief that he was a follower of He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named, betrayer towards the Potters, and an accomplice in their deaths, as well as in the death of Peter Pettigrew and that of 13 muggles.

Each of these accusations were disproven, with the miraculous capture of Mr. Peter Pettigrew. Both men were tried under Veritaserum, and it was proven that Mr. Pettigrew was indeed a Death Eater, and bore the Dark Mark. He also held the role of Secret Keeper under the Fidelius for the Potters, not Mr. Black. Mr. Pettigrew also admitted to blowing up the street, then faking his own death. In addition to these crimes, Mr. Pettigrew admitted that he escaped by turning into a rat, his illegal animagus form that You-Know-Who helped him come into. Mr. Pettigrew was convicted, then sentenced to be given the Dementor's Kiss.

Mr. Black, on the other hand, was declared innocent, and set free, with all of his rights re-instated. The Ministry has issued a formal apology, as stated below by Madame Amelia Bones.

The Ministry gives it's most sincere apology to Mr. Sirius Orion Black for this egregious error. We are horrified by this mistake, and apologize to any pain this may have caused him and his loved ones. We hope, in time, that Mr. Black can find some peace in the life that was so brutally stolen from him. Mr. Black has been reinstated as a full, respectable member of society, and should be treated accordingly. Once again, we offer our deepest apologies and sympathies towards Mr. Black, and hope, in time, he can come to forgive those responsible for this horrible error.

Mr. Black was represented by Ms. Karin Parkinson-McAlistor, a respected member of the pureblood Parkinson Family, and a full partner in the prestigious law firm of Malcom, Mayes, and McAlistor,

but it was not just his lawyer that was a surprise, but Ms. Parkinson's clients that caused quite a stir. YES, HARRY POTTER, the Boy-Who-Lived, along with his supposed guardian, Mr. Remus Lupin, hired Ms. Parkinson to prove Mr. Black's innocence.

Our sources also tell us that Mr. Black also received joint custody of Mr. Potter. We tried to locate Mr. Potter and said guardians after the trial, but all three were unavailable for question...Story continued on page 3

Meanwhile, in the Kitchen

"Wow, Harry. This is really good." Karin commented

Harry grinned "Thanks."

"Harry, you know that you don't have to cook here." Remus added

Harry gave his uncle a reassuring smile.

"I know, but I wanted to. Plus, won't we need energy for...shopping?" he asked innocently "Christmas is in 5 days."

Remus looked torn between laughing and sighing.

"Harry, I'm, uh, not sure it's the best idea today." Remus said slowly "Plus, Sirius may need some time to..."

Sirius cut him off "Moony, if you say the words sleep or recuperate, I'll strangle you. I've had 10 years with nothing to do! I'm ready to enjoy my freedom!"

Remus held his hands up in surrender "Okay...just with the crowds..."

Karin interjected "Hogsmeade shouldn't be as crowded as Diagon Alley."

"But what if Albus...?"

“Even if he’s there, he can’t do anything, plus, you didn’t read the whole Prophet.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean, I don’t know exactly how they got the story, but...”

She pulled out her copy of the Prophet from her bag.

“Page 5.”

As he read, Remus’ eyes got wide.

“But how...?!” he gaped, as he handed the paper to Sirius

Karin shrugged “Looks like they went right to the source. It wouldn’t be that hard to do. It’s not like Azkaban.”

“Umm, Harry...”

“It’s okay, Uncle Moony. I’ve already seen the article. My friends already know, so I don’t really care.”

The three adults were taken aback by the child’s response.

“Uh, O...kay.”

Harry chuckled “So, can we go shopping?” he asked enthusiastically

Remus sighed, and shook his head, amusedly.

“One track mind. Alright, go get ready.”

Harry grinned, and bolted out of the room. In truth, he had an ultimate agenda for this little outing. He had completed nearly all of his Christmas shopping by owl order. No. This trip was about Sirius, and proving to the public that neither he nor his godfather would hide from the public eye.

Back at Hogwarts

Albus' office door burst open!

"Is this TRUE, Albus?!" the stern faced teacher screeched

In her hand, she clutched a copy of the Prophet.

"Minerva, please...calm down."

"Don't tell me to CALM DOWN, Albus!"

"I assure you I had no idea of Sirius' innocence."

"I'M NOT EVEN TALKING ABOUT SIRIUS!" She screamed "Although you were on the Wizengamot when he was sent to Azkaban! I'm talking about HARRY! They ABUSED HIM, ALBUS!"

Albus sighed "I was unaware of the extent of it."

"EXTENT?! Then you DID know it was going on!"

"I knew it would be a hard life, but he was a baby. I never believed they could have such a strong prejudice. Plus, he was truly safest there."

"SAFE?! I don't know what's gotten into you, Albus, but you seriously need to redefine your version of SAFE!"

With that, she stormed out of the room, her magic slamming the door behind her!

Albus sighed heavily. His carefully laid plans were falling apart in front of his eyes, and now, he couldn't even locate the Boy-Who-Lived. All of the tracking charms he had placed on the boy had been disabled, and he couldn't seem to locate Remus' address. He didn't know what he was going to do. Another voice interrupted his thoughts.

"Is it true? My great-great grandson never went Dark?"

Albus looked at the portrait.

“Yes, Phineas, It’s true.”

“Well...then, perhaps there’s hope for the Black Family, yet.”

Down in Hogsmeade

Harry was somewhere between annoyed and amused at all of the stares and whispers they received, as the four of them made their way through the village. (They’d convinced Karin to come along.) After all of the pointing and staring Harry had received during his lifetime, this was nothing, compared to his 4th and 5th years. He could tell that Karin and Remus were also taking it in stride, with practiced ease. He attributed this to Remus’ werewolf status, and for Karin, the fact that she was a lawyer.

Sirius, on the other hand, was almost enjoying this. Well...actually, he was more than enjoying this. He wore a smug look that seemed to tell everyone that he was currently on top of the world!

Frankly, Harry didn’t blame him. The Ministry, of all things, had to admit that they had made a HUGE mistake, and now they were scrambling, trying to do damage control. Aside from the Headlines, and the article about Harry, the Prophet was filled with statements from Fudge, Scrimgeour, several members of the Wizengamot, and many other high ranking officials, most of them, trying to reassure the public that they, personally, were not at fault, and trying to lay the blame at another departments feet.

Lost in his thoughts, he wasn’t watching where he was going, and bumped into a woman.

“Oh, I’m sor...Professor McGonagall.”

His teacher looked startled.

“H...Harry.”

Then she noticed the other people in the group.

“S...Si...Sirius?”

“Professor.” He replied evenly

For a moment, she didn’t seem to know what to say.

“I’m...I’m...so sorry.” Her voice was barely above a whisper

“I’ve been getting that a lot lately.” He said shortly, although not harshly

She didn’t seem to know how to respond. For a moment, there was a tense silence, finally broken by Karin.

“Minerva, we’re headed to the Three Broomsticks. Would you care to join us?”

The older woman looked extremely hesitant.

“Th...Thank you, Karin. That’s very kind, but...”

Harry took one look at his godfather’s facial expression, before interjecting.

“Please do professor. I’m curious as to whether it was my dad or Sirius who held the record for the most detentions.” He added casually

“James did.” “I did.” Remus and Sirius said at the same time

That caused Harry and the two women to laugh.

“No, it was James. He got that detention during our graduation ceremony for releasing a bunch of nifflers on us and all the guests.”

"I helped with that." Sirius huffed "It's not my fault they wouldn't pin it on me. I tried to take credit for it, but James insisted I had nothing to do with it. Plus, his mother carried out that punishment, not Hogwarts."

"Yeah, but James insisted that it count, 'cause it was on Hogwarts grounds."

"He was just mad 'cause we were neck and neck. We were trying everything possible to outdo the other."

"That's why your last week at Hogwarts, was the BANE of my entire teaching career!"

The transfiguration teacher had now reverted back to her stern expression, and she was currently wearing the 'look' that easily silenced the most unruly classroom.

Sirius, on the other hand, currently bore an expression of guilt.

"Well...uh...yeah...kinda." He grimaced

"Do you know how many of your teachers I had to talk into letting you pass and not try to get you two suspended?! They only did it so they wouldn't have to deal with the two of you anymore!"

Sirius recoiled "We were just having fun."

Minerva rolled her eyes "Well, your fun took several years off my life."

"I guess it's good you've got 9 of them then." Sirius smirked

"Sirius Orion Black, you're just asking for a detention." She snapped

"Do you think I could still set the record?" he asked excitedly

She threw her hands up in the air "I give up!" she said, exasperated

This brought a round of chuckles from the rest of the group.

“Sorry Padfoot, but that’s my goal. That’s why I need Professor McGonagall. Dad never mentioned any numbers in his journals, just that he had the most.”

“But Harry, you’ve never gotten a detention.”

Sirius looked horrified at that revelation.

“What do you mean, you’ve never gotten a detention?!” Sirius screeched

Harry chuckled, then smirked at his godfather.

“Don’t worry, Padfoot, I’m just biding my time. I will top you and dad before I finish school.”

Minerva shook her head “I’m just gonna retire now.” She stated, defeatedly

“Another Marauder.” She muttered under her breath

That caused another round of chuckles.

“So will you join us, Minerva?”

“Perhaps I’d better. Maybe I can do some damage control.”

Harry gave his teacher his best look of innocence.

“You can try professor, but it’s pretty hard to get a Marauder to change their spots.” He stated happily

Later that Evening

The day had gone well, as far as Harry was concerned. Even their time with Minerva was pleasant. She had always had a soft spot for the Marauders.

Despite Harry's successful attempts at keeping the conversation light and humorous, it was obvious that she was angry. Her magic was off, but it wasn't sporadic like Augusta Longbottom's had been. It was...boiling.

Harry thought she was just angry about the situation with Sirius, but then he remembered a confession she had made to him several years after he had graduated. She had been there the night Hagrid had brought him to Privet Drive. She carried around a great deal of guilt for not fighting harder with Albus about leaving him on that doorstep. He was guessing that article only multiplied that guilt.

A tapping on the window interrupted his thoughts. He didn't recognize the owl, but relieved it of its burden and unrolled the letter. What he read made him smile. It read...

Hey Harry,

How are your holidays going? I saw your name in the paper. I'm really sorry about what happened to your godfather. I'm not really sure why I'm writing to you. I mean, I'm not really supposed to tell anyone, but...well...you said you knew what happened to my parents. Well, you can't tell anyone, but...something amazing's happened!

My parents, they're...better! I don't really understand how, but someone came up with this new potion and it worked. They actually know who I am. Everyone told me that was impossible. It's really strange...getting to know them, but everyone keeps telling me to take it one day at a time.

I can't believe we're actually spending Christmas together. We have to stay at St. Mungos, but I guess I don't care, I'm just glad my parents are back. Sorry if I'm rambling. I just needed to tell someone. Hope you have a good Christmas. See you back at Hogwarts.

Neville

Harry was happy for Neville. He immediately wrote back a response, assuring his friend that he would keep his secrets. Things were going better than he had planned.

The next day, Remus was back at work. He had left Harry in Sirius' care, although he kind of felt it was the other way around. Harry was unusually mature for his age, although Remus attributed that to the way Harry had been forced to grow up. On top of that, Sirius was still recovering from the horrors of Azkaban.

He was stopped by Arthur in the hallway.

"Remus, how are things going?"

"You mean after the last two days?"

"I saw the articles. What happened to Mr. Black was horrible...and Harry...the boys told me some things. I'm...truly sorry for everything he went through."

"Thank you. I think Hogwarts has been good for him, though, particularly his friendship with your sons. He talks about them all the time."

"As do my kids. That's actually what I wanted to talk to you about. I don't know what your Christmas plans are, but Molly and I would like to invite you and Harry to Lunch on Christmas day."

Remus hesitated "Um...Sirius is staying with us for a while, and Karin's coming over for part of the day..."

"Well...of course...they'd both be welcome."

"Let me talk it over, and I'll let you know. I do appreciate the invitation."

"Of course. Oh, and I've got the file for the Ashton girl."

Remus looked confused "Remind me."

Arthur flipped through several files he was carrying.

“9-year-old girl, mother half veela/half witch, father muggle...uh...mother died about a year ago of natural causes...since then there’s been several assaults and attempted assaults on the girl since the mother’s death, by the father. Some neighbors first reported it to the muggle authorities.”

Remus looked over the file. “Rape?”

“Attempted, once. The girl’s been removed and placed in one of our safe houses, and the Muggle police have the father in custody.”

“Is it just because of the Veela in her?”

“Possibly, and if that’s the case, we could just supply her with the anti-sensuating potion, and place her back in her father’s custody, but...if it’s not, or if she’s too traumatized to go back, our best option may be to try and place her with some of her mother’s relatives within the Veela community. The grandmother’s still alive, along with the mother’s two brothers and a sister.”

“Is the girl also a witch?”

Arthur nodded. “She’s on the Beauxbatons registry. Her mother’s originally from France, and was an alumna from there.”

“Okay. I’ll get Carolina or Natalie to talk with her, and see what she wants. Has anyone interviewed the father?”

“Not yet, but I’ve talked to Alicia, and she’s sending one of our psychiatrists to do an evaluation after the holidays.”

“Good. Could you make sure I get a copy of that report?”

Arthur made a note in the file. “Of course.”

The two of them started walking down the hall.

“So, it sounds like ya’ll are going all out for Christmas this year.”

“Well, we’ve never been able to do just a whole lot for the kids, so...yeah. Charlie’s coming in from Romania, so the whole family will be together.”

“Are you sure you want strangers intruding on that?”

Arthur shook his head “You and Karin are hardly strangers to me and Molly, and the boys and Harry...The more the merrier.”

(A/N: This next part contains some detailed description of implied torture and death. If you can’t handle that, or don’t like it, please don’t read. The detailed torture is limited to the cruciatus curse. Just a warning.)

Later that night

Harry was always on alert; a result from the war. Every little noise made him paranoid. He had currently woken to a sound down the hall. With practiced ease, he silently crept down the hall. The noise led him to Sirius’ room.

His godfather was tossing and turning. Harry could tell that he was having a nightmare, and by the looks of it, it was a pretty bad one. Sirius was silently sobbing, tears streaming down his face, and muttering the whole time, yet he never woke.

Harry knew what he was dreaming about. He, himself, had been captured at the age of 24. Voldemort had been using Azkaban as a base at the time, since the Dementors has sided with them. He had been held in Azkaban for over 3 months before the Angels had succeeded in a rescue attempt.

Harry never understood why Tom hadn’t just killed him. He kept saying that he would, but that he had plans for him first, and seemed content to just continually torture him. The Dementors alone, made him want to kill himself within the first week, but that, coupled with Bellatrix’s Cruciatus, Malfoy’s Dark torture, and Tom’s mind rapes, were enough to break anyone.

To this day, Harry wasn't sure how he had survived, much less managed to regain any type of sanity. He remembered how it had been after he had been rescued. He had been completely numb for several months, not much better than a shell. Nothing anyone said or did seemed to have any affect on him. Not even his wife. Especially not his wife and he couldn't bring himself to tell her why he couldn't stand the sight of her or even be in the same room with her.

He cut himself off from everyone, and at night, he slept by himself, usually crying himself to sleep. Even his strongest Occulmentry shields couldn't stop his mind from reliving the pain and torture he'd endured.

Flashback

One particularly bad night, he'd been startled awake by something moving on his bed. He shot up to meet the faces of his nearly 3-year-old son and daughter.

He had been careless, and forgotten to put up silencing wards. His daughter spoke first.

"Daddy was loud."

"Daddy sad?" his son added

Harry sighed, and put his wand back under his pillow.

"Daddy's okay. You two need to be asleep."

"Daddy was crying. It woke us up."

"I'm sorry baby. Daddy just had a nightmare."

"What happened?"

"Nothing you have to worry about." He answered slowly

He had deliberately been avoiding his children since he'd been rescued. One of Tom's favorite mind rapes was sending false images of his children being tortured or dead. It was hard for him to even look at them, without those images popping into his head. Their screams and pleas as they writhed under the cruciatus, or their mangled bodies, slashed and covered in blood.

He closed his eyes, and tears sprung to them again, as he tried to drown out the echoing screams. He took a deep breath, and was about to put the kids back in their beds, but before he could move, his daughter gently wiped the tears away from his eyes, with her little hand, before sitting down next to him, and burying her head in the crook of his arm.

He was so surprised, he barely realized that his son had crawled into his lap, and was leaning his head against his chest.

For a moment, he wasn't sure what to do, then his daughter made the decision for him. She snuggled closer to him, yawning, her eyes fighting sleep. He looked down to see that his son was already asleep. His daughter yawned once more, before closing her eyes.

"Night, daddy. I love you."

At these words, Harry's heart almost broke. Against what his head was saying, he followed his heart.

"I love you too, baby." He whispered

He leaned back against the pillows, and pulled his daughter close. He shifted his son to the other side, his head, still tight against his chest.

In that moment, Harry felt something that he hadn't felt in a long time...peace. His children had brought him something that no one else could have. As he lay there, just holding his children, watching them sleep, he realized that he had just learned the one thing that Albus had been trying to tell him. The true and ultimate power of selfless...unconditional love.

End Flashback

That night still haunted him, for less than a year later, his wife and children had been so brutally murdered, but he had never forgotten that lesson. The power of a child's love, and the need for simple human contact.

Without a sound, he put up silencing wards, before lifting the blanket, crawling into bed, and situating his back against his godfather's chest. He felt Sirius wake up in surprise, but instead of acknowledging it, Harry closed his eyes, and tucked his head under his godfather's chin, lying on his side.

He felt Sirius hesitate for a long moment, before lying back down, putting an arm around his waist, and pulling his godson close. Sirius was beyond confused. It had been years since anyone had offered a kind word, much less comfort. He didn't understand why Harry didn't blame him for his parent's death. He blamed himself. If he'd never suggested the switch...

Harry felt the tears start flowing again. It was over two hours before his godfather's breathing evened out. Only then, did Harry allow himself to relax, and fall into a hopeful sleep.

Okay, let me be VERY clear on this. This last part was NOT slash. As I have said before, I will NEVER put slash in any of my stories. All it was, was a Comfort/Hurt scene, and I tried to make that clear with the Flashback. In this instance, Harry is acting purely as a child, not an adult. This is not sexual, so I hope you didn't read it that way.

Anyway, I know this probably isn't the chapter you were expecting, but the next one will be. You'll finally see Christmas Day, which includes a glimpse at the Longbottoms, Remus, Sirius, and Harry, as well as the Weasley's, including the reunion many of you have been waiting for, although I'm not sure how long it'll take me to get it out.

Thanks for reading.

Midnight Star 25

A Christmas of Miracles-Part 3

Christmas Day

St. Mungos

"I'm really sorry we couldn't go somewhere for Christmas. I promise it'll be better next year."

Neville shook his head. "It's okay, mum, really."

"I still say they have no right to keep us here." Frank huffed "I say we bust out anyway. What do ya say, son?"

"FRANK EDWARD LONGBOTTOM, you will do NO such thing. And stop trying to corrupt your son."

Frank gave his mother a puppy dog face "Aww mum, I'm just trying to make up for lost time."

Augusta softened a bit, but still held her ground.

"You will not try any such thing till you've been given a clean bill of health."

"And that's exactly what we're here to help with."

The family turned to see another lady carrying a briefcase.

"Is this the Longbottom ward?"

"Yes." Augusta answered defensively "Who are you?"

The woman just smiled "You must be Augusta. It's a pleasure. We have a delivery. Is it alright if we bring it in?"

The group looked surprised, but Frank answered.

"Of course. Please."

“Thank you.”

She stuck her head out the door.

“Alright guys, bring it in.”

At that, a dozen delivery men filed into the room, arms filled with everything but the kitchen sink. One man levitated a fully decorated Christmas tree. Three men carried boxes full of Christmas decorations, tinsel, and magical lights. With a few flicks of their wands, the entire room was a festive winter wonderland, complete with a temporary charm on the ceiling to make it match the wintry sky outside, and make it appear that it was snowing.

The other men brought in package after package of every shape and size, piling those that would fit under the Christmas tree and the rest wherever there was an empty spot.

As quickly as they'd entered, they were gone, leaving behind a mini winter wonderland, filled with presents, the family, and two other women.

“Wha...What's going on?”

“That's what I'd like to know. Augusta?”

“I don't know anything about this.”

“Mr. and Mrs. Longbottom?”

“Yes?”

“Allow me to introduce myself. My name is Christine Andrews. My card.”

Frank read over it. “Real Estate?” he asked confused.

“Well, as I understand it, you'll be getting out of here in a couple of months, and you'll be needing a place to live. That's what I'm here to help you find.”

“What? But how...?”

“Not to worry, Mrs. Longbottom. I’ve been briefed on the delicacy of your situation. Nothing will be made public. I’m merely here to help, and as I understand it, we have several options, including starting from the ground up, to a family residence, or just finding the house that you want. We just want you to have the home of your dreams.”

The second woman spoke up. “I’m here to help with that, as well.”

“May I introduce a friend of mine. This is Pamela Hamilton.”

“It’s very nice to meet you, Aurors Longbottom. My card. I’m an interior designer. Once you decided on a home, I’m here to help you design it. Furniture, appliances, color scheme, and any amenities you’d like a swimming pool, Quidditch Pitch, basketball court...”

She chuckled at the confused looks she received.

“I specialize in both muggle and magical design.”

“But I...uh...I don’t...Who told you about us?”

“We were engaged by the Unity Foundation. Don’t worry. All of our initial fees are taken care of...as a Christmas Present to you and your family.”

“And all this?”

“I believe it’s the same thing, but I was told these letters would offer further explanation”

She handed over 4 letters to Frank.

“Now, I’m sure you and your family are ready to relax and enjoy each other today. You have our cards, and we’ll be in touch after the holidays, when ever you feel up to it. It was very nice meeting all of you.”

“Yes, Happy Christmas.”

And with that, both women exited the room.

“Did...uh...what just happened?”

“I don’t know, mum, but this letter’s addressed to you. There’s one for each of us.”

“Even Neville?”

Frank nodded.

“Me?”

Frank passed out the letters, and for a few minutes, the room was silent. Frank spoke first.

“Honey?”

Alice wore an unreadable expression.

“It...thanks us...for our ‘sacrifice’. The letter’s unsigned. Who...who would do something like this?”

“If this is the Unity Foundation, it would probably have to be either Myers or Lawson, the ones I told you about.”

“But they’ve never even met us.”

Augusta shrugged, thoroughly confused.

“Neville, what does your letter say.”

Neville handed the letter to his grandmother.

“Just to...live life to the fullest and...not take anything for granted.” He said softly

“Augusta, what do these guys want?”

Augusta shook her head.

“According to the contract...nothing. Maria even said they stopped by a few days ago, and insisted that St. Mungos try to keep their names out of the paper, and away from the press as much as possible.”

“So...why are they doing all this?”

“That...seems to be the million galleon question.”

“So, uh...mum, can we...uh...open these?” Neville asked hesitantly

Alice looked at her husband.

“What do you think?”

Frank hesitated “Um, well...I...I guess so.”

“YES!” squealed Neville, excitedly

The adults just laughed.

Back at Moony’s Den

“Here Padfoot, this one’s for you.”

“Where did you find the time to do all this shopping, Harry?”

“I, uh, ordered a lot of it through owl post. Some of the older kids told me how to do it.”

“Oh.”

Harry was sorting through the presents under the tree.

“This one’s for Ms. Karin. When is she coming over?”

“About 11, right before we go over to the Weasley’s.”

“Whoa, a top of the line Lighting Bolt. Harry, how much did you spend on us?”

Harry put on his best puppy dog face, and stuck out his bottom lip.

“I thought you weren’t supposed to ask that kind of question at Christmas. I could ask you the same question. Here, this one’s for you.” He said, changing the subject, and handing an almost identical package to Remus.

“A Windspeed! Harry, this alone is too much.”

Harry just grinned “Hey, I’m gonna need some help practicing this summer if I want to keep my spot on the Quidditch team.”

Sirius spun around “Quidditch Team!? WHAT!?”

Remus chuckled “We were going to keep it a surprise, but I guess the cat’s out of the bag. Harry.”

Harry’s eyes were twinkling with mischief.

“I play Seeker for Gryffindor. Youngest player in a century.”

Sirius’ eyes went big.

“It’s true, Padfoot. He had as much talent, if not more than James did. You should see him fly.”

Sirius was still reeling. “I...I intend to.”

“My first game after the holidays is in the first part of February. It’s against Ravenclaw. Are you gonna come?”

Sirius shook his head. “Try and stop me!”

All of a sudden, there was a tapping at the window. Harry bounded over, and let the owl over, then grinned as he recognized the package.

“What is it, Harry?”

“It’s for me.”

He quickly read over the note.

‘Harry, your father left this in my possession before he died. It’s time it was returned to you. Your guardians will know what it is. I sincerely apologize for any pain you may have gone through.’

‘Hmm. A bit different from the last time.’ He handed the letter over to a waiting Remus, and pulled the string from the package.

“Whoa! It’s dad’s old cloak. I read about it in his journals.”

“James’ invisibility cloak? I forgot Albus had that. James never did figure out why Albus wanted to borrow it.”

Harry knew why Albus had wanted the cloak, but he had no intention of revealing that and by the expression on Remus’ face, Albus was not a good choice for a discussion topic.

He quickly threw the cloak around himself, making everything disappear but his head.

“WOW! This is SO cool! Can I keep it, Uncle Moony, please!? Padfoot, please!?”

Remus reverted back to responsible mode.

“You mean take it to school and potentially get into major trouble.”

“Well of course he does, Moony. He wouldn’t be a Marauder otherwise.”

“So I can!?”

"It's okay with me." Sirius grinned

"Thanks Padfoot!" Harry squealed, giving Sirius a big hug, then he turned back around.

"Please, Uncle Moony."

Remus closed his eyes, and rubbed his temple.

"Alright." He reluctantly consented

"YES!" Harry gave his uncle a hug

"Thank you Uncle Moony! And I promise not to get into too much trouble, but I do have to break that record."

Both adults chuckled at that. Then another voice interrupted.

"Hello. Anybody home?"

Remus moved to greet their guest, who had her arms filled with packages. He helped her set them down, before greeting her with a kiss.

"Hmm, I definitely should have come over here earlier." She stated, returning the kiss

"What's wrong?" Remus asked, concern in his voice

"Oh, nothing. I can just only take so much of my loving family." Dejection and sarcasm in her tone

"It couldn't have gone that bad?"

Karin sighed "Normally it doesn't, but with all this publicity...it's all they want to talk about. They don't care about me. Sometimes I just wish they'd gone ahead and disowned me 6 years ago when I married John. They would have too, if I hadn't just made full partner

at Malcom and Mayes. My father and brother still consider marrying a muggle the ultimate sin.

“But I thought you got along with at least some of your family?”

“Oh, my mother’s side of the family is great, but my dad’s...my mother and niece are about the only ones who even like me.”

“You mean Pansy?” he asked absently

Harry had barely seen the girl since school started. Aside from seeing them in class, he tried to avoid the Slytherins as much as possible, out of, what he knew was misplaced guilt.

“That’s right. She’s a bit spoiled, but my brother’s extremely hard on her. I know what my father and brother...” she looked at Harry, and quickly stopped, mid sentence “I...I know what they...believe, but I’m sorry, it looks like I’m interrupting your...”

Remus put an arm around her, and gave her a reassuring squeeze. “Karin, you could never interrupt.”

“Actually, you’re just in time.” Harry piped up

Everyone looked at him.

“In time for what?” Remus questioned

“Oh, just a surprise.” Harry said, mysteriously “Actually it’s for Sirius.”

“Me?”

Harry nodded, enthusiastically “It’s out on the terrace. It was too big to bring in. I had a friend bring it over early this morning.”

“Too big?”

Harry’s eyes were twinkling with excitement. “Just come on.” He grabbed his godfather’s hand, pulling out to the large terrace, followed closely by Remus and Karin.

Outside, there was a large object, covered by a solid black tarp.

“Harry, what...”

“Just go on.” He grinned

Sirius walked over, and slowly pulled off the tarp. What he saw under it, made him gasp.

“Is that...?” a wide eyed Remus questioned

Harry nodded enthusiastically.

“But how...” Remus questioned. Sirius was still speechless

“Hagrid had it. He, uh...he told me how you let...let him...borrow it that...that night. I thought you might like it back, so he agreed to bring it over. I cleaned it up a bit. Do, uh, do you like it?” Harry asked hesitantly. His godfather currently wore an unreadable expression. Harry was afraid that, maybe, he had made a mistake. Perhaps the bike brought back too many bad memories of that night.

Without warning, Sirius pulled him into a bone-crushing embrace.

‘What was it about his guardians wanting to hug him to death?’ First Remus at the Quidditch game, and now Sirius.

“I...kinda...need to...breath.” He gasped out

“Oh, Harry, you don’t know what...what this means to me.” He stated, as he released him

“Did...did you know your dad gave this to me for graduation?” he said softly, as he ran his fingers over the leather seat.

“Really?” Harry really hadn’t known that, which surprised him.

“Come mere and look at this.” He ran his fingers under the edge of the seat, till a small ‘click’ was heard, and the seat popped up. An

inscription in gold lettering lay on the back of the seat, and an empty compartment underneath. The inscription read

To Padfoot.

The Second Greatest

Prankster in the world.

From the Number One

Prankster in the world.

Prongs

Harry chuckled. Only his dad or Sirius would have that kind of note permanently inscribed on a gift.

“My dad was a character, huh?”

Sirius laughed “He was the best mate a bloke could ask for.”

“Oh, and I got this to go with it.” He said, handing over a brightly decorated box

“Harry, you shouldn’t...WHOA!”

“Sound’s like you approve.” Harry chuckled

“This is...awesome!”

Inside the box, lay a tailored made and very expensive black dragon hide jacket, a matching pair of pants, and a matching pair of biker gloves.

“The place I bought them from said that there were charms on them so that they would be custom tailored once you put them on.”

A huge grin currently crossed Sirius' face, as he unfolded the jacket. The name 'Padfoot' was embossed in gold on the front, left side of the jacket. As he turned it over, Sirius' face turned to one of confusion.

"What...what's this?" he questioned, looking at Harry

Harry grinned "What do ya think?"

On the back of the jacket, there was a large crest, also in gold, with a very familiar looking dog, stag, and wolf.

"I...thought the Marauders could use a family crest."

"Did you design this?" amazement in his voice

Harry nodded.

"Moony, come look at this."

Remus walked over, his eyes lighting up as he surveyed the crest. He ran his fingers across the words displayed on the top part of the shield. In the same gold font, the words Les Maraudeurs, was displayed in a slight arch, and below that was a phrase.

"Fratres in Aeternum." He murmured "Doesn't that mean..."

Harry nodded "It's Latin. It means...'Brothers Forever'. Every family needs a motto, traditional or not."

Both men looked at him, Sirius, wearing a look that seemed to indicate that he felt like he'd just gotten his best friend back. Remus, on the other hand, was giving him a more calculating look, although Harry didn't seem to take notice. Something about the way Harry had said the word 'family' niggled at the back of his mind...like he'd...heard it before...somewhere?

His thoughts were interrupted by Harry pushing a box into his hands.

"I got one for you too, Uncle Moony...and you, Ms. Karin." Producing a third box "Although I had the Slytherin Crest put on the back of yours. I remember you said you were a Slytherin in school."

Karin looked taken aback "Thank you...Harry, but...you really shouldn't have."

Sirius interrupted "You're dating a Slytherin, Moony?...Uh, not...not that there's a problem with that." He added hastily, when he realized the looks he was receiving from Remus and Karin

"Need I remind you, Padfoot that said Slytherin is why you're currently not in Azkaban at the moment, not to mention, the number of Slytherins you dated during school. Ava Greengrass, Sarah Lawson, Heather Travors, Erica Waters, Lindsey..."

"OKAY, OKAY, I get it!" Sirius gasped out "Like I said...not a problem."

"Oh, and there was that little incident with Jennifer Matherson in 6th year ov..."

"HEY, we agreed never to mention that again!"

"Ooh Ooh, I know!" Harry exclaimed, jumping up and down

"The two of you had been dating for like 3 weeks, but you complained that she was too needy, so dad decided to 'help' you out. He sabotaged one of your dates in Hogsmeade, by following you, and dropping an exploding dung bomb in her soup."

"HARRY JA..." but Sirius was cut off, by Remus' silencing charm

Harry smirked, and went on

"Somehow, she got the impression that you did it, and vowed revenge. Two days later, she managed to slip you a 'repetitive potion', that..."

Sirius leapt to clamp his hand over Harry's mouth, but Harry easily dodged him.

"...that made you repeat I love Severus Snape anytime someone asked you a question. Dad actually left some pensieve memories of that one."

Karin and Remus were doing their best to suppress their laughter, but weren't being very successful.

Sirius' expression was priceless, and was currently ranting and raving, now that Remus had removed the silencing charm.

Harry heard something like "Tell me where...now..." and "Destroy, destroy, destroy..."

"Oh, I remember that!" Karin exclaimed "My brother was a...uh...friend...of Severus'. I think he was as embarrassed as you were. He holed up in the Slytherin common room for like three days, refusing to speak to anyone."

"Yeah, well, that's all I wanted to do, but McGonagall wouldn't let Me." a longing bitterness in Sirius' tone

Harry laughed

Sirius glared at him "I want those memories destroyed immediately, and just for that 'no ride'." He stated in a pouty voice

Harry put on his best look of innocence.

"Aww...come on, please...I've got the jacket and everything."

He pulled out a child size version of the jacket he'd given Remus and Sirius, and slipped it on.

Remus was looking at him curiously

"Uh, Harry...what's...what's the name on that jacket?" he asked, amusement in his voice

Harry smirked, as he displayed the name

“Slick?” Sirius questioned “How did you get that?”

“That name wouldn’t have anything to do with a certain prank group at Hogwarts would it?”

Harry just shrugged “I don’t know what you’re talking about, Uncle Moony.” He answered evenly, a twinkle in his eye

“So the next time the ‘Golden Vipers’ strike, I can assume you had nothing to do with it.”

“I’m only a first year.” He drawled

Remus covered his face and shook his head

“I’m doomed.”

Those around him couldn’t help but laugh.

“Okay, you’ve got to tell me about this prank group.” Sirius stated, excitedly, his anger momentarily forgotten

“I will on the back of the motor bike.” He said in a singey-songey voice

Karin interrupted “I’m curious...the wolf, well...that’s obvious, but what about the others? I take it had something to do with your nicknames, but...” she wore an expression that said she was trying to work out the pieces to a difficult puzzle

Sirius’ expression had changed too

“Uh...you’re right, Harry, I will give you a ride. Let’s go now!” quickly pulling himself and Harry on the back of the motorcycle.

“Coward!” Remus snapped, clearly annoyed

“Hey, she’s your girlfriend mate. You explain it to her.”

“And if she decides she wants to chuck you back in Azkaban...?”

Sirius shrugged “Well...then it’s been nice knowin’ ya.” He stated, before starting up the motorcycle, and quickly taking to the air

“Okay, that could definitely make a fun date!” She laughed at Remus’ expression, before turning serious

“But what did you mean about Azkaban? If there’s something I...”

Remus sighed “It’s a long story...Any chance that lawyer-client confidentiality is still in affect?”

Several hours later at the Weasleys

Karin had been, surprisingly, understanding, and claimed she wasn’t going to report Sirius, besides, she said that it would look bad on her, since she had been the one representing him, and claiming that he was completely innocent.

Harry, Sirius, Remus, and Karin had been met with a warm reception by the Weasleys, and introductions were exchanged all around.

The younger kids seemed a bit wary around Sirius at first. After all, until a few days ago, he had been a convicted murderer, and there were still rumors and gossip spreading all over the wizarding world that he still was, and that he had tricked the Ministry into releasing him, using his ‘dark powers’, or some other outrageous theory.

Harry quickly remedied this by letting the name ‘Padfoot’ accidentally slip. Fred and George were in shock for like, a second, before they fell to their knees, bowing and scraping, and started chanting ‘We’re not worthy!’ “We’re not worthy!”

The twins bombarded, both, Sirius and Remus with question after question, so the first hour was filled with tales of the Marauder’s

adventures. There were even a few stories of just James and Sirius that even Harry had never heard.

Even being in the same room with Ginny wasn't the disaster he had thought it would be. She was shy around him, nervous even. Given, his Occulmentry shields were getting a work out today, but...well...it helped to see her as an innocent 10-year-old, rather than an adult. 'She would never...' 'But, she had never...' 'This time she wouldn't...' 'This time he wouldn't...'

Harry shook his head, trying to clear it. This was so confusing, and it was giving him a headache. At least for the moment, there was no threat, and it was Christmas. His first real Christmas in many years, and one that he was actually enjoying.

Lunch had finished just a bit ago, when the doorbell rang.

'Right on time.' Harry had torn himself away from Ron just moments before, and positioned himself close to the door, which he was now opening.

"You know...I think I like the red hair better. Definitely explains your temper."

"Brat."

Harry smirked "Hey, save that for your niece and nephews."

"Speaking of which...?"

Harry nodded "It's going...much...much better then I expected. So...are you ready for this?"

Fabian sighed "As I'll ever be."

"Okay. Here we go." He turned around

"MRS. WEASLEY." He called "THERE'S SOMEONE HERE TO SEE YOU!"

Fabian let out a groan “Is it absolutely necessary to yell?”

Harry smirked again “Hey, I’m a kid.”

Fabian rolled his eyes “Yeah, and I’m a Muggleborn.”

Harry wore an amused look.

“You know we just described our alter egos?”

Fabian gave him an exasperated look, but quickly masked it, as Molly came around the corner, wiping her hands on a dishtowel

“Thank you, Harry, dear.”

She turned towards her visitor.

“May I help you?”

“Hi, Ruby.”

Molly’s face contorted

“Who are you?” she demanded “No one calls me that!”

“Has it really been that long, Ruby? Or should I say, Ruby Rose?”

“Who...are...?”

Harry could see that Molly’s eyes were searching the face in front of her.

She let out a small gasp “F...F...Fab...”

Fabian caught her, just before she collapsed

“Well...I...think she recognized you.”

A cry of ‘DAAAD!’ interrupted them

Harry closed his eyes and shook his head.

“Like mother, like daughter.” He muttered, under his breath, earning an amused look from Fabian

Arthur appeared from around the corner, flanked by Remus, Sirius, Bill, and Charlie, all wands drawn

“Ginny, what’s wrong?!” Arthur’s voice was panicked

Ginny just pointed to the doorway.

Harry could see that this was about to spiral out of control

“Its okay, Mr. Weasley. She just fainted.” Harry said quickly

“Harry, what’s going on?” Remus demanded

Harry put on his best look of innocence, and shrugged.

“I don’t know. I think Mrs. Weasley was just surprised to see Mr. Prewett, here.”

The group looked at the stranger. Arthur spoke first.

“Prewett, but...” he was studying the face before him

“Who are...?” there was confusion in his eyes

“Wh...F...Fabian?!”

“Its been a long time, Arthur.” Fabian answered smoothly, Molly still in his arms

“But...uh...didn’t...didn’t ...didn’t I attend your funeral?!”

It was like a ping pong match, the heads whipping back and forth between Fabian and Arthur.

“That’s...a long story. May I come in? I’ll explain everything.”

"I..uh...I guess you'd better." Indicating his wife

"Can I set her down somewhere?"

Arthur nodded "This way."

Arthur led the way back to the living room, where Fabian laid Molly on the couch

She started to stir

"Ar...Arthur." She moaned softly

"I'm here." Arthur said, moving next to her "Are you okay?"

"I'm fine, I just thought..." She gasped as she spotted the face in front of her

"Fabian?" her voice was a ghastly whisper

By this point, the rest of the kids and Karin had heard Ginny's scream, and had joined the group in the room.

"Hey, Sis." Fabian answered softly

Surprisingly, Percy spoke up "Wait...you're Uncle Fabian?"

"NOO!" Molly screeched "My brother's DEAD!"

"Ruby, please..."

"DON'T call me THAT!"

"Molly..."

"NO! How dare you IMPERSANATE my brother! I..."

Without warning, she inexplicitly stopped talking. Everyone looked confused, waiting for another outburst.

Fabian looked at Harry.

He mouthed the words 'Calming Charm'

'Thank you' he mouthed back

"Molly, please. Let me explain. It's really me."

Harry could see that the calming charm was working, even though she was fighting it. Her demeanor was going from anger to grief.

"But...you...you can't be my..." tears were starting to well up in her eyes

"You can't be him...you just..."

"When you were 8, you stole mum's wand, placed a permanent sticking charm on Gideon's favorite Quidditch T-Shirt, and stuck it to the wall, because he'd turned your hair green and purple with yellow polka dots during one of our summer lessons. You then blamed it on me, and got me grounded for two weeks, but I never told on you because I hated that shirt, with a passion, and had already tried everything I could to get rid of it, because every time his Quidditch team would beat mine, he would put it on, and prance around the house like he'd just won a Merlin's First Class award."

"You SWORE you'd never..."

Her voice faltered

"Fabian?"

"I'm sorry Molly."

Without warning, she launched herself into his arms.

"How did you survive?" she sobbed

"It's a long story."

“Gideon?” her voice was barely a whisper

Fabian shook his head sadly “He really died that night.”

Remus spoke up “Arthur, I think we’d better go. It looks like you need some...”

“No.”

“Excuse me?”

“Please take a seat, Mr. Lupin.”

A look of suspicion crossed Remus’ face

“How do you know my name?”

“You always keep an eye on your family, Mr. Lupin, whether you’re able to be a part of their lives or not. You work with Arthur, if I’m not mistaken.”

“That’s right.”

“Then please...stay. Plus, we have something else in common.”

“Oh?”

“I’m actually speaking to Mr. Black as well. ‘The Eternal Flame.’”

Remus’ eyes widened “You were a...”

“My brother and I both were...That’s kinda where my story begins.”

Molly had finally regained some sense of control, and interjected

“Kids, why don’t you go upstairs and play.”

There was an uproar of protests all around the room.

“No Molly, they need to stay.” Fabian said softly

“WHAT!? No, they’re too young!”

“They need to understand why they won’t be able to tell anyone about me. I just put up series of spells and secrecy charms that affect each person in this room. Anything that’s said in this room...anything I tell you...you’ll only be able to discuss it between the other people in this room.”

“WHAT are you doing, Fabian?! You waltz back into my life, and start casting spells on us?!” her voice had taken the terrifying tone of when she was reprimanding children

“It’s only for protection, Molly.”

“Protection?! You always thought I needed protecting, Fabian.”

“Molly, if...if certain parties...were to find out I’m alive...if one of the kids were to slip...I...I don’t want you to get hurt, Molly.” He sighed, a concerned expression on his face

“And why would you be worried about that, Mr. Prewett...it is Prewett, correct?”

Fabian’s lips twitched into a slight smile

“That’s correct...And spoken like a true lawyer, Ms. McAlister. It’s a pleasure. You’re quite infamous these days.”

“So I’m told.” She stated shortly “But, that doesn’t answer my question.”

“You don’t beat around the bush, do you?”

“I don’t fancy strangers putting a series of unknown spells on me.” She stated, dangerously

“I apologize for that. I was unaware there would be guests.”

Harry discretely rolled his eyes.

“So what is the story, Fabian?” Molly demanded

Fabian looked guiltily into his sister’s eyes.

He sighed “Okay...It all began...”

Fabian gave a highly abbreviated version of how he had joined an ‘organization’ that had helped fight Voldemort, being found out, what happened that night, and what he’d done in the last 20 years. At the end of the explanation, and a series of quick introductions, Molly insisted that Ginny, Ron, Fred, George, Percy, and Harry go upstairs and play.

Once the kids were gone, Molly turned back towards her brother.

“I’m sorry, Molly. It was wrong of me to stay away for so long, but...they...they threatened to harm you, and...and mum and dad.”

He shook his head sadly

“Bill was so little, and you were pregnant with Charlie. I...I just couldn’t...” his voice was starting to break from years of built up emotions

Molly moved next to her brother, and placed a comforting hand on his shoulder

“Thank you, Fabian.”

For a moment, nothing more needed to be said. She pulled him into a much needed hug, which he returned.

She finally released him, tears streaking her face

“Soo...what’s this organization you’re talking about?”

Fabian sighed “I haven’t been a member of it for over 20 years, although I have kept my eye on its activities. That’s how I knew Mr.

Black and Mr. Lupin were members at one point, but Mr. Lupin would probably know more about it than I would.”

Everyone turned to look at Remus

Remus looked uncomfortable at being put on the spot

“Not...really. It’s true though. We were there to fight Voldemort.”(several gasps and shudders occurred around the room, but Remus ignored them) “I suppose you could say that we’ve been...’unofficially’ disbanded for about 8 years now. In truth, I suppose we...just... kind of...faded into existence. We became a part of the war that was no longer necessary, and a part most of us wanted desperately to forget.”

Now Remus wore a grim expression. Karin squeezed his hand gently. He gave her a grateful look, before putting an arm around her, and pulling her close.

“What’s the organization called, and how were you recruited?” questioned Bill, speaking for the first time

Remus sent a questioning look to Sirius

Sirius shook his head

“Don’t look at me, Moony. I don’t know. There’s nothing stopping us from saying something, and I’m sure, uh, Arthur has some idea of what we’re talking about if he’s worked at the Ministry.”

Everyone now turned to look at Arthur

Molly spoke up “Arthur, do you?”

Arthur also looked uncomfortable

“I...think so, but I only know the basics.”

“Is there a reason you’re being so cryptic, Dad?” Charlie questioned

“Well...It’s...It’s complicated. I was never part of it, and like Remus said, that was a part of our lives we...tried very hard to forget.”

There was a moment of silence, before Karin interjected

“May I offer a piece of advice.”

The group looked at her.

“I think you’d offer it anyway, Ms. McAlister.” Fabian answered amusedly “Please.”

She glared, but continued “I admit...I’m intrigued. Sirius stated that there’s nothing stopping you from telling us, and we’re already under your protection charms.” Heavy stress on the last two words “Nothing said here is going beyond the people in this room, and perhaps it would help us understand your story a bit better.”

Fabian looked amused

“It’s easy to see how you got your reputation, Ms. McAlister. I, personally, don’t mind telling you...at least the basics, but I don’t believe it’s just my call to make. Mr. Black and Mr. Lupin were members longer than I was, and much more recently.”

Everyone looked at Remus and Sirius

Sirius shrugged “I don’t care. Protecting the ‘Order’s’ secrets hasn’t exactly been a priority in my life.”

“The ‘Order’?” Bill questioned

Remus sighed “Yes. It was a society known as ‘The Order of the Phoenix’. Something of a...vigilante resistance group for the war. There were members of all ages, but most of us were recruited right out of Hogwarts. I don’t think we ever knew who everyone was. Most of us were pretty excited and eager to join. It was better than just sitting around, listening to rumors, not knowing when or where the next attack would take place.”

“But who recruited you?”

Remus glanced at Sirius before answering

“Albus Dumbledore. He was the founder and leader.”

Bill, Charlie, and Molly all wore startled expressions

Karin, on the other hand, wore a look of understanding, that clearly stated she had just added a big piece to the puzzle, that was her boyfriend.

“Professor Dumbledore?!”

“Albus?!”

Fabian nodded “If you think about it, I suppose it’s logical. He was the only one that Voldemort ever feared.” (once again, several gasps echoed around the room)

“I’m surprised at you, Molly. You never used to fear that name.”

Molly shifted nervously

“That was over 20 years ago, Fabian. Things change.”

“You actually used to say his name, Mum?”

Molly looked guiltily into her sons eyes

“It...it was a long time ago, before...before the worst part of the war.”

“Molly, he’s not going to appear just by saying it.”

She let out a heavy sigh “I know...I know, Fabian, but...you don’t...don’t know how hard...after...after you and...then Mum and Dad...I...” she was starting to tear up again

Fabian pulled her close

"I didn't mean to cause you any more pain, Molly. I...I was at Mum and Dad's funeral. It only reinforced that I was doing the right thing by staying away. I felt like it was my fault."

"But...that happened 5 years later, and it was a random attack."

"I know. It was just guilt, wondering if I could have done more to save them."

"So, uh...why reveal yourself now?" questioned Arthur

Fabian hesitated "A...friend...showed me the error in staying away for so long."

He turned back towards Molly "You are the most important person in the world to me, Molly. I love you, and that will never change!"

Molly was tearing up again

"So, um, where...where are you living?"

Fabian grimaced "I...can't tell you that. Not yet, anyway!" he added quickly

"What?! Why?!"

"I'm undercover right now, Molly. Like I said, if certain parties were to discover that I was alive, there could be trouble. I know which Death Eaters were there that night. I can identify them, and not all of them are in Azkaban."

Molly didn't know how to respond, but Karin spoke up.

"Mr. Prewett, if you have information on Death Eater activity, you should report it to the proper authorities."

Fabian gave her an amused look

"Do you trust the Ministry, Ms. McAlister? They did such a bang up job on Mr. Black's case. Even if I were to bring charges, they would

almost instantly be dismissed. These men are as innocent of Death Eater activity as you are guilty, but they bribed and blackmailed their way out of a conviction. They are ruthless, Ms. McAlister, and I won't be responsible for putting my family in that kind of danger!"

An uncomfortable silence followed Fabian's declaration, as no one seemed to know how to respond.

Meanwhile, Upstairs

"So, I guess it's pretty weird that your Uncle's alive, huh?"

Ron shrugged "I guess. Mom's always talked about him, but I never knew him."

Harry could tell that this didn't really affect Ron, Fred, George, or Ginny. They were too young to understand the magnitude of this. Percy was the youngest one who seemed to have some sense of its significance, and was currently brooding that he should have been allowed to stay with the adults.

Harry decided to change the subject

"So, where is everyone?"

"In their rooms I think."

"Well, come on. I'm bored. It's not snowing right now. Let's see if we can't talk them into a game of Quidditch. Plus, don't you have a new broom to break in?"

Ron's eyes lit up "Yeah, let's go see."

They made their way down the hall to Fred and George's room

"Hey, Harrikins, we were just about to come and find you."

"Oh, and why's that?" he asked suspiciously

“Well...we just thought our Uncle deserved a proper welcome into the family.”

“You know a traditional Weasley welcome. Show him what he’s getting into.”

Harry grinned mischievously “What’d you have in mind?”

A bit later

Harry cautiously stuck his head in the living room. The adults were softly talking. He cleared his throat, alerting them to his presence. All conversation stopped.

Harry took a moment to observe Fabian and Molly. There was a sadness in their faces, but the happiness or contentment was more then evident. His thoughts were interrupted by Remus.

“What is it, Harry?”

“Um, we just wanted to know if it would be alright if we went outside.”

“Actually Harry, if you would, could you go tell the boys and Ginny to get ready. We’ll be leaving shortly.”

“We’ll be going too, Harry, so don’t go too far.”

“Where are we going?”

“Our work’s throwing a Christmas Party for some of the kids we...help. Molly, Arthur, and I have volunteered to help out for a bit.”

Harry suppressed a small smile

“Okay, I’ll go tell them.”

As he walked back up the stairs, he heard the comment

“Wow, no argument. I’m impressed, Remus. What’s your secret?”

“Don’t look at me. It’s just...Harry. The only things we argue about are just the little things, and the only big argument we’ve had was at his first Quidditch match when he didn’t want to go to the Hospital wing.”

Sirius interrupted “And just WHY would he need to go to the Hospital wing?!” he demanded

“That...is a story in itself.”

Harry chuckled as he continued up the stairs, and entered the twin’s room.

“Well?”

“Sorry guys, but the pranks gonna have to wait, but I’ve got an idea for another time. We just need some ingredients, a little bit of time, and...”

An excited glint appeared in the twin’s eyes as Harry laid out a future plan.

Alright, there’s the reunion between Molly and Fabian. I tried to make it realistic. Let me know what you think. For those of you who liked it, there will be future interaction between said brother and sister.

For those who hoped to see a big Harry/Ginny scene, sorry for disappointing. There is a reason for it, and you’ll see that in later chapters. If you want a clue as to why, go back and reread the two small sections right before the flashback scene in Chapter 24.

Oh, and I’ve got one request. I need a little bit of help. I’ve gotten a lot of reviews saying that things are going too perfect for Harry, and I think you’re right. Life is never perfect, and everyone has problems,

but I'm having a hard time coming up with plausible scenarios. I do have some problems coming his way, but I still feel I need some ideas, so if you guys have any, I'd really appreciate the help:-) You can either leave it in a review, or PM me. If I use your idea, I'll give you credit. Thanks in advance.

Oh, and this is the last installment of 'A Christmas of Miracles'. The next chapter will still be Christmas. I'll be showing Unity House, the main safe house for the 'Unity Foundation', and their Christmas party, but it'll have it's own title.

Thanks for reading.

Midnight Star 25

Unity House

The main safe house of the Foundation, more commonly referred to now as 'Unity House' or as the kids liked to call it, HOMAR (House of Magic and Reyna), was currently covered in a fresh blanket of snow. It was a beautiful old two story house. An observer from the outside would describe it as large but modest. An observer from the inside would describe it as...HUGE. It was magically expanded, but decorated in a simple, homely fashion.

It was presently decorated with everything Christmas. Two huge Christmas trees, brilliantly lit up and covered in ornaments, many the children had made themselves, dozen's of presents beautifully wrapped, a charmed ceiling to mirror the real one outside, and an interesting gold and silver color scheme of decorations. The house was filled with dozens of people, and the laughter of children filled the rooms.

The group of seven adults and six kids Flooded into Unity House. All those who hadn't been there before were amazed by its sheer size. They were greeted warmly by Emily Weston. She was an older distinguished witch in her late 80's, although still considered middle-age by wizarding standards. She had grown up and raised a family in England. She had children, grandchildren, and was currently anticipating the arrival of her third great-grandchild. She was a widow of four years, and a retired Healer from St. Mungos. She was the 'House Mother' (like Dorm Mother) for Unity House, and the children seemed to look to her as a grandmother figure. In fact, most of them called her 'Grandma or Nana Em'.

"Welcome. Welcome." She greeted, a smile gracing her face

"Emily. Happy Christmas." Remus responded, placed a small peck on the older woman's cheek

"Oh, Remus, you're such a charmer." She smiled, cheerfully

“It’s a good think I’m not the jealous type...although...I could consider changing that position.”

The adults chuckled, as Remus placed a reassuring kiss on Karin’s cheek

“You know I would never cheat on you.” Remus stated, a sly smile on his face

Karin smirked “Good...‘cause if you ever do, I’ll show you just why I was sorted into Slytherin.”

That brought another round of chuckles

“Karin, dear, it’s good to see you again. We truly appreciate the help.”

Karin smiled “And you, Emily. I’m glad we were able to come.”

“And this must be your family. Sirius Black and Harry Potter.”

The surprise showed on Remus’ face, but Emily just laughed.

“I do read the Prophet, Remus...but...Minerva McGonagall just happened to pay me a visit a few days ago. We’re old friends from our Hogwarts days. We were in the same year, and both in Gryffindor. It’s a pleasure to meet you Mr. Black...”shaking Sirius’ hand “...And you, Mr. Potter. The both of you are quite the legend.”

“Harry, Sirius, this is Emily Weston. She’s the Headmistress of Unity House.”

“A pleasure.” Sirius replied, taking her hand

“It’s very nice to meet you, Ms. Weston.” Harry responded, politely

She was surprised at this child’s manners, but responded.

“And you, Mr. Potter.”

“Just Harry.”

Well, he certainly wasn't shy

"Then you must call me Nana Em. It's what most of the kids call me."

Harry gave her a genuine smile. "Thank you. I'd like that."

"And Arthur, Molly, Bill, so glad you could bring the rest of your family. You speak so highly of them."

"Thank you, Emily. This here's..."

"Oh, don't tell me...You must be Charlie, Percy, Ginny...Ron...and...Fred and George." Correctly identifying all of the Weasleys.

"I'll never know how you do that, Emily. You have a memory like..."

Emily chuckled "I call it a gift...and sometimes a curse. I learned I had a talent for memorization as a child. But enough of that. Welcome all of you to HOMAR."

She got some curious looks from the party.

"Umm...why is it called...Homar?" questioned Charlie

Emily laughed "It's just what the kids have started calling it. It stands for 'House of Magic and Reyna.'"

There were still looks of confusion

"What does that..." but the question was never complete

Without warning, a large tiger seemed to appear out of nowhere, rushing at the group, in attack stance, and seemed to have its attention focused directly at Harry! Before anyone could react, the tiger LEAPED, AND...

...started licking his face, knocking Harry over. Harry was doing everything possible to keep from laughing at the expressions on those who had no idea as to what was going on.

They all seemed too stunned to speak.

Emily was also holding back her amusement, but there was laughter in her eyes

“Everyone, this is Reyna, our local pe...” she stopped as Reyna let out a soft growl, still lying on top of Harry

Emily shook her head in amusement “Sorry, our local protector.” Reyna seemed to give a curt nod in approval

“For some reason, she doesn’t like to be called a pet. I’m sorry about her knocking you down, Harry. She’s fairly friendly around new people, but I’ve only ever seen her do that to one other person. Reyna off.”

Reyna jerked her head, as if to say ‘no’

“Reyna...now.”

She still didn’t move.

Harry chuckled, then reached out to her mentally.

‘Reyna, could you please get off me.’

She seemed to glare at him, but responded.

‘You’ve been away too long. You said you’d be back two weeks ago. You’d better have that potion.’

Harry let out a mental chuckle ‘I’m sorry. Things didn’t go exactly as planned...and I do have the potion. Now, could you please get up before someone becomes suspicious? I promise I’ll talk to you in just a bit.’

‘Ooh...alright. I am glad you’re back.’

He gave her a scratch behind the ears as she climbed off.

‘Me too.’ He agreed

“Are you okay, Harry?” asked a worried Sirius, as Harry stood up

Harry chuckled “I think she like me. What kind of Tiger is she?”

“A White Bengal, and supposedly magical; at least according to our Founder, Mr. Myers. He’s the one who actually placed her here. I was incredibly hesitant to have any animal that...large...around the kids, but Jacob assured me that she was completely trained and wouldn’t pose a threat to the kids, and as much as I hate to admit it...well, I’d never admit it to him, but...she really has helped. We had this one kid who was getting seriously bullied by another. We knew he was doing it, but he was smart, and we could rarely catch him at it. Then, all of a sudden, it stopped, and the child seemed happier. When we asked him about it, he just said that Reyna started showing up every time he started getting bullied, and put a stop to it. It’s amazing, but she’s very protective of almost all the kids, and...well, after the initial case of nerves...they seem to really take to her.”

Harry suppressed a snicker ‘If she only knew what she had just admitted’

“But enough of that. We need to get back to the party.”

“Just tell us what you need help with.” Stated Molly

“Well, I could use some help with the food and drinks, and then later on, with the presents.”

“Okay...kids, why don’t you go...socialize. I know that there are several kids here from Hogwarts.”

Several of the Weasley’s appeared startled by this revelation.

“What?...Who?”

“Ooh...lets see...Derik Jackson...4th or 5th year Hufflepuff, I think...Sara Benson, 2nd year Ravenclaw...Terri Neilson...4th year Gryffindor...uh...Remus?”

“Um...Ben Eldridge...5th year...Slytherin, right? Bethany Welch, 3rd year...Hufflepuff...oh, and Rhonda Macleroy, 6th year Gryffindor...I’m pretty sure there’s a couple of others, but Emily would know better than I would.”

Emily nodded “There are...why don’t you all just go and meet them. The kids are excited about all the visitors. Several others have been able to bring their families as well.”

Harry had been amazed to learn just how many current Hogwarts students didn’t have a real home to go back to. With the Christmas holidays, Unity House had more than a dozen additions to the 30+ children they already had, and during the summer, he found out that there were at least half a dozen or so more. Most of the ones who decided to come back, instead of stay at the school, were coming back to younger siblings who weren’t old enough to attend Hogwarts.

He was deeply saddened when he read the files of some of these students. Their situations ranged anywhere from car crashes, parental natural death, abuse, abandonment, and even one house fire. It was true that he had truly had a horrible childhood the first time around, but it was now he realized that he hadn’t been alone (or...wasn’t alone?). He was determined, at the very least, to give them hope of a bright future, or at least the option. It was still their choice. As he had learned many times over, you couldn’t force a person to choose the right path or make good decisions.

As they entered the room, he was pleased to see the merry atmosphere. People were laughing and talking as friends. Children were scattered all around the room, playing or talking with each other. The ‘no-melt icicles’ glistened as the twinkling Christmas lights were reflected on their surface. The room and atmosphere were truly...magical.

“Uhh...Harry...” Ron started shakily “Are you...sure that...”

“Ron, she’s fine.” Harry answered amusedly “Why don’t you pet her. She’s really gentle.”

Reyna had yet to leave his side. The twins and Percy were already ‘socializing’ with some of the students they knew, and Ginny was hesitant to leave her mother’s side. Ron seemed hesitant to strike out on his own, but he seemed rather scared of Reyna. In part, he didn’t blame him. She was fairly intimidating. Standing nearly four feet tall and over eight feet long, coupled with her razor-sharp teeth and domineering air, most people gave her plenty of distance.

“Hey, isn’t that Justin from Hufflepuff?”

Ron looked over “Yeah...I think so. I wonder what he’s doing here.”

“Well, why don’t you go ask?” Harry knew that his sister worked in the Spells/Curse Division of the Research Department

“Mee? Why not you?”

“Well, I would, but I think Reyna has other plans.”

Indeed, Reyna was tugging on his sleeve.

“Uh, well I’ll just...”

Reyna let out a low growl

“Uh, I’ll just go over there.” He said, quickly retreating towards the other side of the room

Harry let out a small chuckle, as Reyna impatiently dragged him out of the room, and into a deserted hallway

‘Impatient much?’ he chuckled

‘Only when you should have been here two weeks ago.’ She reprimanded, sharply

'I said I was sorry. Besides you're only 8 weeks along. As long as you take this dose before your 10th week, it should still do its job.'

'Well, excuse me for being concerned.' She huffed

'I'm sorry, Reyna. I know this is only your second litter, and that you're still hurt at how your first one was taken from you.'

Reyna let out a menacing growl, clearly upset at the reminder.

'Don't worry. Those guys will never poach another animal.'

Flashback--6 weeks ago

Harry had snuck out to Knockturn Alley to pick up some of the more sensitive potion ingredients required for the nerve regenerating potion for the Longbottoms. He was currently in disguise, with a dark cloak and hood and an obstruction charm obscuring his face.

He turned a corner, and was suddenly met with an obstruction. Two men were levitating a large covered object that had strange noises coming from it. They were like muffled cries, and for a split second, Harry was terrified that it was a person. As horrible as it was, human trafficking was not unheard of, and could easily be found in Knockturn Alley and other such places.

Without a word or warning, he wandlessly vanished the sheet that covered the rectangular object. What he found underneath was the last thing he had expected. A gorgeous white tiger, pacing angrily up and down the steel cage. All of a sudden, he seemed to hear her thoughts.

'Stupid, stupid humans. I'll bite them! I'll hurt them! I'll kill them if they try to take my babies again!'

Harry wasn't sure why he could hear this animal's thoughts, but he felt empathy towards her, and immediately knew what these men were.

The men had realized that the covering was gone, and were trying desperately to get it covered up again. Harry interrupted their work.

“HEY.” He barked, startling the men from their work.

“WHAT?” another huffed “Can’t you see we’re busy here?”

Usually, what happened in Knockturn Alley stayed in Knockturn Alley, and very rarely did anyone interfere with another’s business.

“What are you doing with that tiger?” he asked sharply

“What’s it to you?” the second one sneered

“Well, maybe I’m just into...endangered species.” He drawled

The man grinned, an evil glint in his eye

“I...doubt...you could afford our merchandise. We have a very...exclusive...clientele.”

“Try me.” Harry challenged

The man looked at each other, then sneered “Fine, but don’t say we didn’t warn you.”

“Lead the way.”

Harry wasn’t sure if the connection to this animal, whatever it was, only went one way, but he decided to test

‘Don’t worry, I’ll get you out of here.’

Apparently it had worked, because the tiger suddenly stopped pacing, and stared directly at Harry.

‘You can understand me?’

So it did work both ways. ‘Yes, although I’m not sure how. Tell me, these guys are poachers, right? They sell animals?’

The tiger seemed to nod 'Yes. They breed animals, like me, then they take our cubs and sell them. Sometimes they sell us too.'

'Thank you. That's all I need to know.'

Harry turned his attention back to the two men. They had led him to a small dark room, filled with multiple cages of all shapes and sizes, and in those cages, animals, many he recognized as either extremely dangerous, extremely rare, or a combination of both, and almost all of them illegal to sell or own.

"You have quite an...impressive...collection here." Harry commented

"Only the best." One of the men added

"Not that you'll ever be able to tell anyone. Crucio!"

Harry barely had time to duck, and quickly threw up his hand, producing a shield that automatically absorbed the oncoming curse.

"Evancio! Imperio!" cried the other one

The shield absorbed the first, but the second one was much more powerful, and hit Harry in the arm. Unfortunately...well for the two imbeciles in front of him...nothing happened. The Imperius Curse hadn't had an effect on him in years.

"Tk, Tk, Tk." Harry chided, wagging a finger "Two unforgivables, and a dark binding curse, and on a complete stranger. I have to say, the quality of our...underworld...figures certainly isn't up to the standards it used to be."

"Shut your mouth, BOY!" the first one growled

The two threw several additional spells, which Harry easily dodged. In battle, footwork was just as important, if not more important, than the curses or shields you knew.

Harry put his hand over his still obscured mouth, and pretended to yawn.

“Is that the best you’ve got?” he asked lazily

The two were about to cast another series of spells, but Harry was quicker. Two silently cast and strategically placed stunners hit their marks with dead-on accuracy. The two wizards crumpled to the floor.

Harry shook his head. They really were idiots. Taking on a completely unknown wizard, showing him at least part of their...stock, and moving an animal like that in broad daylight, even if it was Knockturn Alley.

He quickly picked up their wands, before conjuring several ropes, binding and preventing escape.

He then turned his attention back to the animals, and the tiger in particular.

‘Hello. Can you still hear me.’ Harry thought, directing it towards the large animal

‘Quite clearly. What did you do to those two? Are they dead?’

‘No. I just stunned them.’ Harry literally felt the disappointment coming from the tiger

‘Sorry...but I try to avoid killing whenever possible.’

‘But they took my cubs!’ the tiger shot back, venomously

Harry was solemn ‘I’m truly sorry for that. How long ago?’

‘Almost a year.’ The grief was still in her voice

Harry knew that tiger cubs stayed with their mothers ‘till they were nearly two years old. He also knew that there was little chance of locating them. He decided to redirect.

‘And you’re pregnant again?’

The tiger seemed to nod.

‘Well, I can guarantee you that you won’t be separated from this litter. You have my word on that. But perhaps you can answer my question. How is it that I can communicate with you?’

The tiger shrugged ‘I can only think of one possibility. It’s a legend among my kind. It’s quite rare for a white Bengal tiger to be born, even within the magical packs, and when we are, we’re born with special gifts and abilities. It’s said that each of us have a shreshtha mitra.’

‘A...best friend?’ Harry questioned

‘You speak Hindi?’ the tiger asked, clearly surprised

‘Not fluently, but I know enough to get by. So this shreshtha mitra...is it like a familiar?’

The tiger seemed to think for a minute ‘I suppose you could call it that, and the bond is similar, but we call it a bhagidari or sajhedari.’

‘A partnership...interesting. So what does it entail?’

‘Well, not only can we understand all human speech, but once we meet our mitra, we create a mental link that allows us to communicate with them telepathically. They’re the only ones we can do that with. Once the bond is formed, we’re able to sense if the other one’s in trouble, as well as the other’s emotions if they’re strong enough, no matter what the distance, although the telepathy is limited by distance. There’s said to be other connections that arise over time, but each case is unique...at least that’s what I was told by my mother and our pack.’

Harry felt the sorrow as she mentioned this

‘How long ago were you captured?’

‘About three years ago.’

'I truly am sorry for that. So...I'm your mitra?

'It would seem that way. I do feel a connection to you. I suppose that's the bond forming.'

'Interesting; I'll have to do some research on this. By the way, what's your name?'

'Reyna. What's yours?'

'I'm Harry. Reyna? That's unique. Isn't that from Spanish origins meaning Queen?'

The tiger nodded.

'Why don't you have a Hindi name; just out of curiosity?'

The tiger shrugged again. 'My mother's name was Rani, which means Queen in Hindi. She said she wanted something similar for me. I was the only white cub born in our pack, and highly revered. She decided on Reyna, even though it wasn't Hindi. I guess she just liked it.'

Harry chuckled 'I never knew animals thought about those kinds of things. Of course the only other animals I've ever talked to are snakes, and I've never thought to ask them that kind of question. Wait...you said you could understand human speech?'

'That's correct.'

"So if I were to talk to you like this, you can understand me?"

'Perfectly.'

Harry closed his eyes and shook his head. "Why can't my life ever be normal?"

This time, it was Reyna's turn to appear amused.

Harry pulled out of his thoughts. "Okay...Reyna. I guess we need to decide what to do. I could call the Ministry authorities and turn these guys in, but I have my reasons for not wanting to deal with them, plus I think they would get off with a fairly light sentence, and probably be back in business within six months."

Harry seemed to be analyzing the situation.

'So what do you suggest?'

"Well...I know!" he exclaimed, if a light had suddenly come on

Harry pulled out his communication mirror, and removed the obstruction charm. "Fabian Prewett" he stated clearly

A moment later, Fabian appeared in the mirror.

"Hey Harry. Somethin' wrong?"

Harry shook his head "Nothing immediate."

"Okay. Can I ask why you're wearing a hood and cloak? Aren't you supposed to be in school?"

"It's Saturday."

"I repeat, aren't you supposed to be in school?"

Harry rolled his eyes "I was doing some shopping and ran into a...distraction. I need some help with it. I need you to contact Shamira, oh, and tell her to bring a team with her."

Fabian raised a curious eyebrow "Jerosa's daughter? I take it you don't mean an Angel team?"

"Well, actually I need you to contact Saylek as well, but not his team. He can handle the initial stuff himself, but as far as Shamira goes, no, not this time. I need her other area of expertise. She's a huge animal rights activist. She runs an Animal Rescue Reserve within the Goblin

community outside of Durham. I think she'd be very interested in what I...stumbled onto."

"And just what might that be?"

"Just a couple of poachers in Knockturn Alley?"

"And just what are you doing in Knockturn Alley?" Fabian asked sharply

Harry was taken startled by Fabian's tone, but then laughed in amusement.

"Fabian, you've been spending waay too much time with Remus. You're starting to sound just like him. What do you think I am; a kid?" he smirked

Fabian shot him a dirty look. "Well, in all fairness, you didn't exactly tell anyone just where you'd be if something were to happen,"

Harry just shook his head in amusement "Fabian, I think you're trying to get into your uncle role a bit too soon, and definitely with the wrong person. I'm an Angel, I've been an Order Member, and I've destroyed one of only two Dark Lords in the last 100 years, and you're worried about me being in Knockturn Alley?"

"Well, you will be my future, uh...nephew-in-law." he chuckled, realizing the absurdity

Harry bit his lip, as his features went hard "No...I won't." he said softly

Fabian looked up, clearly startled "What?"

"I won't." Harry repeated, his eyes downcast, refusing to meet Fabian's questioning gaze

"May I ask why?" Fabian asked after a moment

Harry bit his lip again, but shook his head "A story for another time."

Fabian realized that he wasn't going to get any further information, and let the issue rest...at least for the moment.

"Alright, well, I'll contact Shamira and Saylek. I'll try to have them there within the hour. What's the address?"

Harry gave him the location, and after a few more questions ended the mirror call. He then turned his attention back to his new familiar...or mitra.

"Okay, Reyna. Help is on the way, but we've got a little bit of a wait. Could you tell me anymore about this bhagidari?"

End Flashback

"Feel better?" Harry questioned

Reyna nodded. She had just finished lapping up the potion Harry had poured into a small bowl.

'I know you think I'm paranoid, I just want everything to be okay. After all those potions and stuff they gave me...'

"I don't think you're being paranoid." Harry said, reassuringly "You're just being a good mother, and this potion will help remove anything harmful they may have forced upon you, and should strengthen your cubs in the process."

'Uh, Harry, aren't you worried about someone hearing you?'

"Nah, I put up a ward that will alert me if anyone comes within listening distance."

No sooner were the words out of his mouth, then he suddenly felt the vibrations of the wards going off, and switched to telepathy.

'We've got company.'

'Yes, I recognize their scent. It's two of the boys that live here.'

And indeed, two young boys came around the corner.

“Reyna, there you are!” one boy exclaimed

“We were looking everywhere for you.” The other one stated

Harry recognized the two boys from their pictures in their files. They were somewhat tall for their age. He couldn’t remember exactly, but no more than 7 or 8. One had sandy blond hair and blue eyes, and the other had dark brown hair with eyes to match.

Reyna ‘purred’ as they entered, and rubbed up against their legs, twisting in a figure 8, before lying back down at Harry’s side where he was sitting on the floor, his back against the wall. He scratched behind her ears, and stroked the top of her head, before turning his attention to the two boys.

“Hi. I’m Harry.”

The boys looked at each other.

“I’m Rick.” Said the blond haired boy, and obviously the older of the two’

“And I’m Alex.” Stated the other “Are you here for the party?

Harry smiled “Something like that. Do the two of you live here?”

Both boys nodded

“How’d you know?” Rick questioned

“You knew Reyna, and she seemed to recognize you.”

“Oh. How come she likes you so much? You don’t live here...do you?”

Harry shook his head “Let’s just say...that we met before, and became fast friends. So how old are you?”

"I'm 7." Stated Rick proudly

"Hey! I'll be 7 in February." Huffed Alex

Harry chuckled "Are the two of you friends?"

Rick shook his head.

"No?" Harry asked, a bit surprised

"No. We're brothers. Blood brothers."

Harry was confused. He knew they weren't, but realized what the child meant, when he held up his hand, and revealed a small scar. He remembered a time when Dudley was 9, and had come home, happy as a lark, announcing to everyone that he and Piers had performed a ritual and were now officially blood brothers. Dudley then tried to use it as a reason to get rid of Harry. He said now that he had a brother, he didn't need a cousin. By the looks he received from his Aunt and Uncle, he truly believed they would have tried, if they had believed for a second that they could have gotten away with it.

Rick was still talking "We decided, since we didn't have any family, well, Alex does, but they don't want him..."

"HEY, that's not true!" he said forcefully "My mum does. She said so!"

"Yeah, but that was when you were 4, almost three years ago! She's not coming back!"

"YES SHE IS!" Alex said forcefully "She...she just said it wasn't safe, because I...was special, but she would come back one day!"

"Yeah, well that's what my dad said, but he walked out, and never came back, and then my mum died, and he still didn't come."

Harry felt true pity for both boys. He knew their stories. Alex had been 4 when he had been left on the steps of the orphanage he'd come from. Rick had gone to the same orphanage at the age of 5 when his mother had died from cancer. His father had been located, but was a

muggle, and was incredibly hostile towards the ideas of magic, and had claimed that he had no son. No other relatives could be located, so the boy became a ward of the state, since his mother, who was a muggleborn witch had been living in the muggle world. Harry decided to try and redirect the conversation, before things got out of hand.

“Hey, guys. It is Christmas. Why don’t we talk about something else? Can you tell me how they two of you became brothers?”

Both boys’ eyes lit up at the question, and their quarrel was temporarily forgotten. They went into a detailed explanation as to just how they had become ‘blood brothers’. At the end of their explanation, Harry posed another question.

“So what do you think of this place?” He knew what it was like from an adult’s perspective, but he wanted to hear a child’s.’

“Ooh, it’s totally awesome! We each have our own rooms, and can decorate them any way we want to!” Alex exclaimed

“Its definitely better then the last place.” Added Rick “I hated the last place! Some of the teachers were nice, but others weren’t.”

“How about the teachers here?”

“Most of them are really nice, and Nana Em is brilliant! Professor Leon is kinda strict, but he says that that’s just because he’s teaching us potions, and it could be really dangerous if we used the wrong stuff, but outside of class, he’s really cool. He’s teaching us to fly and play Quidditch, which is totally awesome.”

Harry chuckled. The boy seemed to like that phrase.

“And what do you think Rick?”

“Yeah, the teachers are pretty nice, and I loove Quidditch. I never knew about it before I came here, and I never got to fly, and Professor Leon knows all kinds of tricks and stuff! Do you play Quidditch?”

Harry smiled "Yeah. I play Seeker."

"Really? I want to play Chaser, although Professor Leon says that I'd make a good Keeper." (Rick)

"I want to play Keeper or Beater. Beaters actually get to hit people, and not get in trouble for it." (Alex)

Harry chuckled, thinking about what the twin's reaction would be to that description of their coveted positions. Actually, they'd probably agree with them.

"So what else do you learn here besides Quidditch and potions?"

"Well, they're starting to teach us spells and stuff."

"Yeah, a few weeks ago we all got to go to a place called Diagon Alley. Have you ever been there?"

Harry nodded

"That place was AWESOME!" exclaimed Rick "And we all went to this place called Ol...Ol..."

Harry smiled "Olivanders." He supplied

"Yeah, that's it! We all went to get wands." He said, proudly, pulling out a brand new wand "He didn't want to sell us them at first. He said that we were too young, but then Nana Em got Ms. Ryder to come and show him some papers from the Ministry saying that we were allowed to have them."

"Yeah, mine's got a dragon heartstring core." Exclaimed Alex, also pulling out his wand

"What about yours Rick?"

"Phoenix feather, but I think a Dragon one would have been cooler." Rick said, slightly dejected

Harry chuckled "A Phoenix core is nothing to be ashamed of. Some of the most famous witches and wizards have had Phoenix wands. I have a Phoenix core too." He said, pulling out his own wand "Tell me, have you learned any spells yet?"

Both boys nodded.

"Have you learned the levitating spell yet?" Harry questioned, even though he knew they had since he had helped write the curriculum. It had been...somewhat difficult finding teachers willing to teach 5 through 10-year-olds magic, and even more difficult setting a curriculum that they were willing to teach.

"So, have you managed to pull it off?"

"Well, kind of, but it's really difficult." Rick reluctantly admitted

"And you, Alex?"

Alex nodded enthusiastically "Yeah, I got it on my 4th try."

"Showoff." Rick muttered

Harry shook his head. He could tell that Rick was much less accepting of his situation than Alex was, and much angrier because of it. Despite himself, this called for a lesson.

"Alex, can you perform the spell now?"

The boy's eyes lit up, as he nodded. He pointed his wand at a small lamp.

"Wingardiu Leviosa."

The boy hadn't said the spell exactly right, but he still got the desired result. The lamp was now floating about 6 inches above the table, and Alex was looking extremely pleased with himself.

"You didn't say the spell right." Rick accused

Alex frowned "But it still worked."

"Actually you're both right." Harry interjected

The boys were startled out of their argument

"Do you know why?" Harry continued

The boys looked confused but shook their heads.

"Alex, can you perform the counter charm to set the lamp back down."

Alex shook his head "We haven't learned that yet."

"What if I told you that you didn't have to know the actual spell to perform it?"

Both boys wore looks of pure interest. This is why Harry disagreed with so many of the arguments that a child shouldn't be taught 'till age 11. The younger the child, the quicker they were to believe, thereby the quicker they mastered the spell, and ultimately, the greater control they had over their magic...that is, if they were taught correctly to begin with.

"How?" Alex questioned, childhood curiosity sparkling in his eyes

Harry smiled "How could you perform a spell without knowing the actual words or saying them exactly right?" Harry wanted to get the boys thinking, which appeared to be exactly what they were doing. For a long moment, he just let them. Alex finally broke the silence.

"Because we were able to do magic before anyone started teaching us."

Harry chuckled "That's right Alex. The magic doesn't come from the words, it comes from within you. Don't get me wrong, the words are important. The words and your wands help you direct your magic, and filter it so you're able to make your spells more powerful, but the

magic comes from you. It's inside you, a part of you, one that no one can take away. Now, back to the spell."

The levitating spell had worn off on the lamp, and it was now lying on its side on the table. Harry barely remembered to pull his own wand, before he performed the levitating spell back on the lamp.

"Okay. Alex...I want you to point your wand at the lamp, and just think about what you want it to do. Think about lowering the lamp back onto the table."

Alex did as he was told, and seemed to be concentrating extremely hard. After a few moments of nothing happening, he got frustrated, and dropped his wand to his side.

"Its not working." He grumbled

"Don't worry, that was a good try. Rick, come here."

The other boy hesitated, but then complied.

"Now, I want you do the exact same thing Alex did, except I want you to concentrate on your magic.

Rick looked confused "But I can't even perform the levitating charm. How am I supposed to undo it?"

"Magic isn't difficult. It just takes time to learn, so don't become upset if you don't get it the first time. Many people will try to make it more complicated then it really is, but remember this...the magic is always within you. You can't loose it. You just have to focus and control it. Each and every one of us has a magical core. It's like a...ball of magical energy inside of you. Focus on that, use it, and you'll be able to perform almost any spell you can imagine. Learn the right incantations, and you can perform spells you could never imagine. Now, Rick, do you think you can do that? Focus on your magic, then direct it."

The boy still looked hesitant, but nodded.

He drew his wand, and pointed it at the lamp.

“What do I say?” he questioned

Harry pursed his lips “Say...Don’t say anything.” He paused “Close your eyes.”

The boy looked like he didn’t want to, but after a moment, his eyes were tightly shut.

Harry laughed “Not so tight. Relax. Use your magic. Focus it.”

The boy nodded, and went back to the set task. He concentrated for several minutes, but nothing happened. Like Alex, he began to get frustrated.

“I can’t do it.” He moaned “I’m just no good...”

“Rick...don’t talk like that.” Harry said sternly “You can do this. If you don’t get it tonight, that’s okay, but I don’t want you to think that you can’t do it. I want you to try one more thing for me. Are you willing?”

Rick hesitated, but nodded.

“Good. Now, I want you to think back, and see if you can remember a time you remember performing accidental magic. Do you remember a time?”

The boy thought for a moment, then confirmed that he did.

“What were you feeling then?”

The boy looked confused “What do you mean?”

“Were you happy? Sad? Angry? Magic, especially accidental magic, is tied to our emotions, but since we know that, we can use that to our advantage, especially when you’re first learning how to use it. As you get older, and become more experienced, the spells’ll become second nature to you. You’ll be able to perform them without even

thinking about it, but it takes a long time and a lot of practice, so don't get frustrated if you don't it the first time."

"I was happy." Rick suddenly interjected

Harry was a bit startled, but quickly recovered "Good, now I want you to remember why you were happy."

"It was my birthday. I was turning 5. My mum..." he bit his lip, and stopped talking for a moment, but then continued "...she had gotten me something that was wrapped in this really big package. She told me that I had to wait 'till the guests got there, but I was really excited, and kept asking her if I could open it 'now', and she kept telling me to wait. So I just kept sitting there, in front of it, dying to know what it was. I kept picturing myself ripping the paper off, and discovering the bike that I really wanted. Then all of a sudden, that's exactly what happened! The paper started coming off by itself, almost like a pair of invisible hands were pulling it off, and the bike was under it! Mum was a little upset that I didn't wait, but she said that she was really impressed at the magic I'd performed, and that I'd make an amazing wizard."

The 7-year-old currently wore a big smile, and seemed much happier then he had a moment ago.

"Okay Rick. Focus on that memory. Focus on your mum...and try the spell again."

Rick pointed his wand, and redirected it towards the table and lamp.

Nothing happened for a moment, then without warning, the table started to shake, before rising several feet in the air, doing a loop-de-loop, and setting back down with a thud!

Harry was stunned, but then clapped the boy on that back.

"That was Brilliant!" exclaimed Harry "You're mum was right. You will be an amazing wizard, and incredibly powerful one, if I'm not mistaken."

The boy beamed at the praise.

Meanwhile, Alex was frowning, not like being shown up. The lamp was still floating in the air. Thinking of a memory and concentrating like his 'brother' had, closed his eyes, and focused on the lamp.

All of this went unnoticed by Harry and Rick, until the lamp started to move, and suddenly it was flying around the room! It whizzed to one end of the hall, before coming back, at a dangerously high speed!

Harry was afraid that it was about to crash, and was about to stop it, when...it did just that! The lamp slowed down, almost to a complete stop, hovered for a moment, before setting gently back down onto the table

Harry chuckled softly as he realized what had just happened. Both boys had just performed magic that neither should have been able to pull off, at least according to most. It was truly amazing, considering their age, and he knew that Alex hadn't started showing signs of magic till just a few months ago.

"That was Excellent, Alex. I think it's safe to say that both of you will be incredibly powerful. I know 16 and 17-year-olds who couldn't pull off what you two just did, and you pulled it off without saying anything. Most people don't try to learn how to perform spells without speaking till their 15 or 16."

Both boys' eyes went wide, realizing that they had just received a huge compliment.

"Really?!" questioned Alex, wide-eyed

Harry nodded "Really. Just think if you keep practicing that, you'll probably have mastered it within a few years."

The boys looked at each other, determination in their eyes, understanding that a challenge had been issued.

"Can you do spells without talking?" questioned Rick

Harry chuckled "Yes." He said evenly

"Show us." Demanded Alex

Harry shook his head. He was in teaching mode "Show us, what?"

"Huh?"

"Show us what? What do you say when you're requesting something? What's the polite way to ask?"

Harry could tell that there was a battle between their pride of getting things done their way, or submitting to the request of a boy, who wasn't much older then themselves.

"Show us...please." Alex said, somewhat hesitantly

"Thank you." Harry smiled "Remember this too, manners are just as important as learning spells, potions, or anything else. They're all important parts of being a member of society, especially if you want respect from others. You have to show respect to others before you'll get it...Take Reyna for example."

His mitra raised her head, hearing her name, curious as to where he was going with this.

"What about her?" questioned Rick

"She likes the two of you, right?"

Both boys nodded

"Is there anyone she doesn't like?"

The boys hesitated, but then Rick answered

"Well there's...you won't tell the teachers or anything will you?"

Harry shook his head "I promise."

Apparently that was good enough for a 7-year-old.

“There’s this one kid. His name’s Anthony. He’s like 12 or something, and he’s not magic. He doesn’t seem to like anyone, and always tries to pick on us, but then Reyna started following him, and every time he started teasing us or something, she’d make him stop.”

“So he’s a bully?”

The boys nodded.

“So Reyna doesn’t respect him, right Reyna?” he asked, scratching behind her ears

The tiger nodded in response

“You see, Reyna is very intelligent. She knows who has good motives and who doesn’t. She’s protected you and the others because you’ve been kind to her and respected her. You gave her respect, then she gave it back to you. That’s how it works with people too. Now, since you asked nicely, what kind of spell would you like to see?”

The boys seemed to think for a minute, before Rick spoke up.

“Do you know how to do trans...trans...you know, where you turn one thing into another? Professor Travis turned a bird cage into this huge eagle that flew all around the room! It was really cool!”

Harry chuckled “Transfiguration.”

“Yeah, that’s it!”

“Alright.”

He thought for a moment, then pointed his wand at the same lamp, and a moment later, a small puppy stood in its place. Its tongue was hanging out, panting slightly, before letting out a happy bark, and jumped down off the table. It started running around both boys, barking happily, before jumping into Alex’s lap, and pawing at his shirt.

Both boys were obviously amused, and it showed in their expressions. The dog had moved from Alex to Rick, and both boys were enjoying the pup. The only one who didn't seem to like the dog was Reyna. The hair on the back of her neck was currently standing on end, and her blue eyes followed the, in her opinion, annoying little intruder, like a hawk.

Harry chuckled as he felt his mitra's emotions. He interjected his own opinion.

'Oh come on, I think he's cute.'

The tiger glared at him

'He's an annoying little runt with that yippie little bark.' She huffed

The dog, seeming to have just noticed the cat, bounded up to it and tried to lick its nose.

Reyna, sensing the intrusion on her personal space, quickly moved out of reach, growling softly at the small dog.

Harry chuckled, and with a flick of his wand, levitated the dog back onto the table, silently transfigured it back into the lamp.

"Awww." whined Alex

"Can't you bring him back?" groaned Rick

"Oh, not right now. I'm pretty sure it's almost time for presents."

The boys' eyes lit up at this.

"Besides, you'll soon have lots of little kittens to play with soon."

The boys looked confused

"What do you mean?" asked Rick

"Well, Reyna's pregnant. She's going to have cubs."

Both boys' eyes went wide with excitement. They started chattering excitedly about all the different ways they would play with the cubs, which included, but was not limited to, climbing trees, playing hide and seek, and flying with them during Quidditch practice.

'They will NOT be doing ANY of those things with MY cubs!' Reyna huffed, obviously annoyed

Harry chuckled 'Well...I'm sure you can make the boys see...reason, but as I learned from my kids, you fall under the curse that every parent suffers.'

'Oh, and what's that?'

'That kids have a mind of their own, and with you as their mother I have no doubt they'll inherit that strong will, as well a your, uh...stubborn streak.' he added cheekily

Reyna growled a bit, and nipped at his heels, before turning up her tail, and leading the way back to the main room.

Harry laughed again, as he and the two boys quickly followed her

He never noticed a pair of blue eyes watching him from around the corner. Remus felt ridiculous at spying like this. He hadn't meant to, but when he had asked the youngest Weasley boy where Harry was, he said, somewhat exasperated, that he hadn't seen him since that 'bloody tiger' had pulled him away.

That made him somewhat concerned, seeing as how the tiger had jumped on Harry when they had first arrived, then seemed to take a personal interest in him. Maybe he was being paranoid, but after everything that had been revealed with Pettigrew...

He went looking for the boy, and heard voices in the hallway. He heard his nephew's voice say something about 'why' someone was happy. Then a boy's voice he didn't recognize started talking about his birthday party. He then heard his nephew again, tell the boy, whose name was apparently 'Rick', to 'focus' and try 'the spell' again.

‘What spell? What was Harry doing? Harry knew he wasn’t allowed to use magic outside of school...but then again, this was a school, and the children who lived and were taught here were allowed to use magic under this roof...he just wasn’t sure how Harry had known that, or if he even did. Perhaps these kids had told him.

He was about to reveal himself, but then decided just to watch for a moment. He peaked around the corner, and was stunned when he saw that the table the boy had his wand pointed at suddenly flew into the air, and did a flip before coming back down. He was sure that the boy hadn’t uttered anything, which made the feat even more amazing, considering the child couldn’t have been more than 8 or so.

Perhaps it had partially been accidental magic. After all, most cases like that were tied to the emotions of the child. He heard his nephew congratulate the child, and was just about to come out of hiding when he saw the other child he didn’t recognize refocus his wand, and point it at the lamp. The lamp was suddenly zooming towards him, and natural instinct made him jerk back around the corner.

He knew that that spell had been performed without speaking, although he attributed it to a combination of strong emotions, and a need to outdo the other boy, whom he was assumed was his friend.

He heard his nephew praise both boys, then mentioning that most people didn’t even try silent spells till they were older.

He then heard one of the boys ask if Harry could perform silent spells. He was sure of what his nephew’s answer would be, but was once again, startled by his words. ‘Yes’. How would Harry know how to perform silent spells? He’d only been at Hogwarts for 4 months, and he knew that wasn’t First year material. Maybe he was just trying to impress these boys.

Alex, whose name he had heard a moment ago, demanded that Harry show them. Instead of immediately complying, Harry surprised him again. He went into a lecture, of all things...about manners? As he listened to the conversation, he was actually impressed as to what he was hearing. Harry spoke with knowledge and authority...much

like a parent would speak to a child when they were trying to teach a lesson, only Harry's method...well...he did it in a way that brought it down to their level.

He was impressed when he used the tiger as a parallel. He was also a bit disturbed when Rick mentioned the name of the bully. That must have been the child Emily had mentioned earlier. Perhaps that was why Harry had brought it up. He then started speaking about the tiger, and with a familiarity that...confused him, but that left his mind when he saw Harry's response to Rick's request for a silent transfiguration spell.

Even if Harry could pull off a silent spell, transfiguration was an incredibly difficult subject. He was sure that Harry would try to get the boys to ask for something else, so he was surprised when his nephew just chuckled, pointed his wand, and silently cast a spell. The result of the spell made Remus' eyes bug out! He slumped back against the wall; quickly double checking to make sure what he'd just seen wasn't an illusion! Harry had just performed some very advanced transfiguration, and just how he had done it was beyond Remus' comprehension.

Remus started contemplating all of the possibilities as to just how that was possibility. One plausible possibility came to mind with Harry's advanced use of silent spells. He had spoken with the Healer and gotten a look at her report that had been required of Harry, by the courts, once charges had been filed against his relatives.

The Healer at St. Mungos had been beyond disturbed at all of the signs of abuse she had discovered, and said that she was surprised that the boy wasn't in worse condition. By her calculations, one of the boys ribs had been broken, and had never been mended professionally, either by muggle or magical means, and her conclusion was that, whether or not Harry had been aware of it at the time, his magic had been the only thing to heal it. There were several other things, including a sprained wrist, multiple scars and bruises that seemed to indicate worse injury in the past, also never properly treated, and to Remus' horror, the list went on and on.

Perhaps Harry, in an attempt to protect himself, had either consciously or subconsciously, learned to use his magic 'silently' to protect himself at a young age. Even the possibility of that sent a new surge of anger and guilt through him.

As far as the transfiguration went...that still confused him. Perhaps in the process of learning to protect himself, he had built up his magical reserves, or perhaps...what...what if it had something to do with his...scar? No one truly knew what happened that night, and there were so many mysteries and rumors surrounding that thing, as well as his nephew. No one knew just how he had survived, or why. There could be a possibility there.

Getting lost in his thoughts, he had missed the rest of the boys' conversation, and they were now moving back to the main room. After he was sure they were gone, he turned around and went the opposite way back to the party, still contemplating everything he had just witnessed, determined to figure out the mystery, that was his nephew.

Several Hours later

It was now 3 a.m. Christmas had officially been over for 3 hours.

Harry apparated back to the cave entrance he had visited mere days ago.

He was met by a waiting Saylek. He bowed to the goblin before addressing him.

"I trust there were no problems."

"The switch was flawless...and I take it your memory charms did their job?"

"Perfectly. And our...guest?"

The goblin gestured towards the back. The two of them walked back, and Harry peeked into a small holding cell, cut directly into the stone, the only window on the door, and the only source of light from a small floating illuminating charm.

An unconscious Wormtail lay in the middle of the cell.

"I take it he got the Royal Treatment?" it was more of a statement than a question

A dangerous smile played on the Goblin's face "As do they all." He said simply

"But I'm a bit confused why you felt the need to use a Messenger Team. A Guardian Team would have been able to pull this off with their eyes closed. The prisoner was far from...dangerous, and the switch was easy enough."

"Of course I trust any of the Guardian teams, but I needed the best on this. The prisoner, himself, is not particularly dangerous, but if he were to escape, or if the Ministry had actually gotten a hold of him..." Harry paused "Let's just say it could cause some nasty effects on the Wizarding World."

"All because of...him?"

"Sometimes the most unlikely candidate can cause the most damage."

The goblin nodded in understanding. As both a goblin and a Messenger, he had learned the value in not underestimating an individual.

"So...is he completely out?" Harry questioned

"Should be for the next 6 hours or so."

"Good! Time to give our illustrious Death Eaters a late...Christmas Present."

He walked into the cell, and a few moments later, reemerged.

“That’s it?” Saylek questioned, a bit surprised

“For now. That should cause enough stir. All I ask is that he be kept alive with his soul and magic intact. That blasted thing is connected to both!”

The Goblin smirked “As you wish.”

Harry gave a short bow. “Thank you. I’ll be back in a few weeks.”

“And it’ll be a repeat of tonight?”

Harry smiled turbulently, fierce determination in his flashing emerald eyes.

“One step at a time, Saylek. One step at a time.”

In a dark part of the Hogwarts Dungeons, a Potion’s Master was startled awake.

With a feeling of dread in his chest, he slowly lifted his sleeve.

He was instantly chilled to the core, and it had nothing to do with being in the drafty dungeons in the dead of winter.

‘NO! NO! NO! THIS WASN’T POSSIBLE! It meant...It meant...Albus had always said...

He couldn’t seem to get his thoughts straight! His mind was going a mile a minute!

He had to tell Albus! He rushed to the Floo, and nearly screamed ‘HEADMASTERS QUARTERS’!

“ALBUS...ALBUS!”

A moment later the alert face of Albus Dumbledore appeared

“What is it Severus?” he asked calmly

“May I come through?!” came the breathless question

“Of course.”

Albus stepped back, as the young man hastily came through

“What’s wrong?” Albus questioned, maintaining an appearance of calm, although his eyes held a different story

Severus was pacing frantically!

“It’s happened, Albus! It’s finally happened!”

“Calm down, Severus. What’s happened?”

Severus ripped up his sleeve “THIS!” he shouted

Albus paled at the sight of it

“Wh...When did this happen?”

“Just a few moments ago!”

For a minute, there was nothing but silence

“So what do we do now?” Severus snapped

When Albus finally spoke, his one word answer spoke volumes

“Prepare!”

In a large, lavish manor, Lucius Malfoy was still enjoying the remains of a Christmas Party. A tingling sensation suddenly drew his attention.

Excusing himself, he slipped into a corner. As he lifted his sleeve, a sadistic smile slowly appeared on his aristocratic face.

In a dark, dank cell in Azkaban, a maniacal laugh echoed long and loud throughout the walls of the ancient prison, emphasizing the evil those same walls held within.

All throughout England and Europe, similar reactions of both fear and true sadistic happiness occurred almost simultaneously.

In that instant, a dangerous game had begun, and Harry had made the first move. He had opened a door that would be nearly impossible to close; for at that moment, the Dark Mark was unmistakably a shade darker than it had been in over 10 years!

Okay, I am SOO glad this is finally finished. I'm sorry it took me so long to get it out. I'm not sure how long the next one will take me, but I'll get it out as soon as possible, so please be patient.

A note on the Angels. They are divided into two groups, and within those groups, they form teams. Every Angel holds the status of Guardian, but once joined, they can opt for the training to become a Messenger, which carry out the more sensitive business of the Angels...in other words, assassins...as mentioned in Chapter 10, in a History of the Angels.

Anyway, PLEASE let me know what you think. Your reviews are what keep me going. Thanks in advance.

Midnight Star 25

Relationships, Rituals, and Fireworks Oh My

It was 4 days after Christmas, and Harry had just received a note from Neville.

Harry,

Hey. How is everything? I wanted to say 'thanks' for keeping this secret, and I just wanted to let you know that you won't have to much longer. Gran says that they're going to release the news to the press in two days. She's not too happy about it. Neither is Dad, but Mum's not worried. She said that she's the level headed one in the family, and she really hopes that I inherited that particular trait from her. I just laughed. I'm becoming more comfortable around them, but it's still kind of weird. Oh, and Christmas was AWESOME! I can't wait to tell you about it. It's kind of a long story. Oops, Gran's calling. I'll write again soon.

Neville

Hey Nev,

I'm glad to hear things are going well. I can't wait to hear about your Christmas. I had a really good one too. I suppose we both got our wish of family. I was wondering if it would be alright if I came to see you before school starts back up. I'd love to meet your parents. Did you know your mum is my godmother? It's true. I looked it up. It was in the records in my parents vaults. My mum was your godmother, as well. They were, apparently, best friends in school. Anyway, I know all of you are busy, so if now's not a good time, I'll just see you back at Hogwarts. Hope the rest of your holiday goes well.

Harry

Hey Harry,

Wow! I didn't know that about our mums. I'll have to ask her about it. I asked Gran if it was okay if I had a friend from school over. She kinda got upset over that. I sorta forgot to tell her that I'd told anyone. When I told her it was you, and explained the situation a little bit, she was still a bit upset, but did say that you could come over. If you want to come tomorrow, I can put your name on the visitors list. I'll be at St. Mungos most of the day. Just let me know.

Neville

Hey Nev,

Tomorrow sounds great. I'm sorry if I got you in trouble with your Gran. I hope she wasn't too mad. I guess I'll see you tomorrow.

Harry

"Uncle Moony."

Remus looked up from the Prophet he'd been reading. It was after supper, and the three of them, Remus, Sirius, and Harry, were relaxing in the living room.

"Hmm?"

"Could we go to St. Mungos tomorrow?"

This got both men's attention, and Sirius set down the papers he'd been going over.

"Why?" Remus questioned with true curiosity

Harry spoke with true compassion in his voice.

"A friend of mine's staying there over the holidays. I'd like to go see him."

Remus' face contorted "Did someone get hurt?"

Harry shook his head "No. Neville's just staying there with his parents over the holidays."

At this, both Remus' and Sirius' faces went pale

"Harry...do you know..."

"Uncle Moony, you can't read about me or mum and dad without coming across the account of the Longbottoms and the Lestranges."

Sirius spoke up, his voice slightly shaken

"Harry...you...you should know that...that Bellatrix is my..."

"Cousin. I know." Harry interjected evenly

"Her maiden name is Black. Your name and relation to her is right there in those books, as well."

He saw the look of concern that still showed in Sirius' face.

"It's okay, Padfoot. We can't choose who we're related to. If we could, Dudley certainly wouldn't be my cousin, and I wouldn't be related to the Dursley's in any way!" his tone just a bit more then slightly acidic

Sirius' face relaxed slightly

"Alright Harry, I suppose we can go for a bit tomorrow."

Harry smiled "Thanks Uncle Moony. Besides, Isn't Alice Longbottom my godmother?"

Remus looked surprised again

"I...suppose that information would've been in your parents vault?"

Harry nodded

“Yes, she wa...is. She and your mum became best friends in school. It was tragic when they were...” His voice faltered

Harry nodded again

“Yeah, it’s really hard on Neville...but at least his parents are getting better now.” He added in a chipper voice, and scampered out of the room before his guardians could figure out what he’d just said

He knew he’d be questioned later....o-kay...maybe sooner rather than later. Apparently his Uncle, at least, had processed his words, and the way he had yelled out ‘HARRRY!’ seemed to indicate he wanted an explanation.

Harry chuckled, then used his Occulmentry exercises in order to keep a straight face, before turning heel and making his way back to the living room.

The Next Morning-St. Mungos

The three of them trooped down the hall towards the long-term care ward. Both men had been disbelieving of Harry’s claims ‘till he showed them the letters from Neville. Of course, Harry didn’t ‘know’ any more about this than what Neville had told him, so he couldn’t answer any specific questions, but both men had insisted upon accompanying Harry for the day.

As they approached the Longbottom ward, they were immediately stopped by a big burley guy, whom Harry assumed was the guard that Neville had mentioned.

“I’m sorry, but this is a restricted area.” He stated gruffly

Harry just smiled “I understand that. We should be on the visitors list. My name is...”

“Harry!” exclaimed another voice

“Hey Nev.” Harry greeted back

“It’s okay Mr. Crosby, they’re with me.”

The guard didn’t look happy, but let them pass.

Harry chuckled “Thanks for the save. That guy looked ready to eat us for breakfast.”

Neville laughed “He is a bit scary at first, but once he gets to know ya he’s...nah, he’s still scary.”

Harry laughed “Neville, you remember my Uncle Remus.”

Neville nodded

“And this is my godfather, Sirius.”

Neville looked somewhat hesitant. There were still rumors flying around about Sirius, but Neville was courteous

“It’s nice to meet you, Mr. Black.” He said somewhat shakily

“And you Neville.” Sirius replied. He could see that the boy was a bit skeptical, but he was making an effort

Harry then took over

“So how are things going?” He questioned

Despite the current tension, there was a distinct difference in his old friend. His posture had changed, he seemed to radiate more confidence, and he simply seemed...happier, over all.

“It...it’s good. Weird, but well...”

Harry could tell that he was hesitant to say more in front of adults

“So is...is it alright if we...”

“Oh, yeah, come on.”

Neville turned, and led the way towards his parents ward. As they entered, they were immediately met by Augusta Longbottom

“Neville...I thought you said that there was only going to be one visitor?” came her stern voice

“Uh, I...”

“Forgive me, Madame Longbottom. It’s not Neville’s fault. I’m afraid I was unaware that my guardians would be accompanying me.”

“Mother...” came another voice, warningly “I thought we agreed that you weren’t going to harass Neville’s guest.”

Frank Longbottom suddenly appeared from around the corner. Harry could tell that the potion was doing its job. Not only did it restore the mind, but it helped the body return to functioning properly. His cheeks were slightly flushed, his eyes were brighter, and he simply looked healthier.

“Neville, aren’t you going to introd...Remus!”

To say that Remus and Sirius were stunned was something of an understatement

“And Sirius! I can honestly say that you’re the last people we expected to see today.”

Remus was having a hard time finding his voice

“Uh, I...I think I can honestly say the same thing.”

Frank chuckled “Yes, I suppose so.”

“Uh, Dad, this is my friend, Harry.” Interrupted Neville, slightly hesitant

Harry took the initiative “It’s nice to meet you, Mr. Longbottom.” He addressed politely

The man looked down at him

“And you Harry. We’ve heard a lot about you. Please, please, come, all of you.”

He turned, and led the way back into the room

“Alice.” Frank called out “We have guests.”

A moment later, his wife appeared from around the corner

“What was that, dear?”

“Neville’s guests have arrived.”

Harry was the first to approach

“Hi, Mrs. Longbottom. I’m...”

“Harry...yes, there’s certainly no mistaking that.” She gently caressed his face” Just like when you were a baby. So much like your father, except...except your eyes.” She smiled softly “Lily loved the fact that you’d inherited her eyes.”

For a moment, she seemed to be dazed, but the next, she was back

“I’m sorry. I’m Alice.”

Harry smiled “I know. I recognize you from your pictures.”

He reached into his pockets, and pulled out a single wizarding photograph, and handed it over.

She sucked in a breath as she took it.

The picture was of two women, sitting up in hospital beds, each holding a newborn baby, wrapped in identical blue blankets, waving

at the camera, and their respective husbands standing next to them, both smiling proudly.

“This was the day Lily and I left the hospital with you two. You were born less than 24 hours apart. You were both so...” tears sprung to her eyes, as she seemed to get lost in the memory

Another voice interrupted

“They were both loud as I remember it. That picture was about the only moment either one of them was quiet.”

Alice looked up in surprise

“Sirius!..This is a surprise.” Her eyes moved to the other guest
“Remus! I...Come in. Please. Take a seat.”

The group moved to sit down.

“I...we...”

Sirius was stumbling over his words

“You...you look lovely Alice.” He finally got out

Her cheeks tinted slightly

“Thank you, Sirius.” She replied softly, then she laughed

“And you’re right, that was the only moment they were quiet. Lily said that it was because they thought they were brothers, and didn’t want to be separated.”

Remus chuckled “I remember that. James finally had to place a calming charm on Harry, just to get him out of the hospital.”

At this, Harry whirled on him

“He did WHAT?!” outrage in his voice

The momentarily stunned group suddenly broke into laughter. It continued for a minute, before Remus finally calmed down enough to speak

“Hey, it was either that, or hand you back over to the nurses for ‘tests’ as they alluded to. For some reason, they thought something was wrong, although...” Remus paused “You know, knowing what we do now, maybe we should have...”

Harry’s death glare silenced him in mid sentence, but it didn’t stop the wolfish smirk from spreading across his features

Harry muttered something incoherently, but sounded strangely like ‘Golden Vipers’ and ‘revenge’

Neville, who was standing next to him, seemed to be the only one to catch this, now had both eyebrows raised in surprise, but didn’t say anything about it

It hadn’t been intentional, but Harry’s outburst seemed to be the much needed icebreaker, with the exception of Augusta, who was remaining strangely silent.

“So...how’d you silence me?” questioned Neville

That brought an amused look to his father’s face

“Uh, you...you were just hungry.” Frank said slyly

“O...oh.” Neville stuttered, blushing furiously, resulting into another round of laughter

“Frank Longbottom! Stop teasing our son!” his wife commanded, in a reprimanding tone

Frank chuckled “Sorry honey. I couldn’t resist.”

His wife just shook her head, before turning her attention back to the picture in her hand. A sense of loss seemed to fall around her as she gently caressed the image

“So...Harry...where’d you get this picture? I mean...” her voice faltered

Harry just smiled “It’s okay. When Mum and Dad went...into hiding, they put a lot of their valuables into their vault. That...particular picture was on top of, well...”

Harry bent down, opening a magically expanding knapsack he’d brought with him, and pulled out a medium sized, square shaped package, wrapped in brightly colored wrapping paper

“This.” He stated simply, as he handed it over to Alice

She currently wore a confused look. “What’s this?”

“Um...I think it’s a bit late, and...I’m just hazarding a guess here, but considering the note on the card says ‘Happy Birthday Alice’, I’m going to assume Mum didn’t mean it for Gryffindor Appreciation Day.”

A loud snicker could be heard from behind

“Do you remember when we came up with that, Moony? We posted ‘official’ signs on the bulletin boards in all the common rooms, then made that huge banner appear in the Great Hall at Breakfast?”

Now Remus was chuckling

“Yeah, and remember how we made the poster 5X bigger in the Slytherin common room, then charmed all the furniture to flash red and gold?”

“How could I forget? It was the one time we were able to con Regulus into giving us the Slytherin password. Although it helped that we had that stash of fire...”

“Sirius Black!” Alice snapped “There are Children in the room! They do not need to get any ideas from your miscreant behavior!”

“Oh, and this from the girl who, along with her best friend, decided to go skinny dipping in the black pond in their 6th year.”

“SIRIUS!” she nearly screamed, going completely beat red, while Remus and Frank had burst into laughter, Augusta was looking outraged, while Neville was simply looking mortified

Harry, on the other hand, had his head in his hands, shaking it back and forth

“Sirius, I SWEAR, you just scarred me for life! I so did not need that image of my mother!” letting out an violent shudder

Sirius just smirked “Sorry pup, sometimes the truth hurts.”

Harry just groaned, and decided to redirect the conversation. He turned back to the group

“Please forgive my godfathers antics. He’s just asking for the events of his 7th year dance to be revealed...on the Quidditch pitch.” He added wickedly, although mischief danced in his eyes

Sirius paled slightly “There’s...no way. James never kne...”

Harry smirked “But mum did. I guess she figured I might need that little piece of blackmail one day...or she just wanted me to learn from your mistakes. Either way, it works.”

This brought another round of chuckles from Remus, Frank, and Alice

“Well, if what I’m reading in the Prophet is true, I’d say the two of you have your work cut out for you as guardians to this one.” Frank stated amusement in his voice

“Oh, I don’t think you’ll have it much easier.” Sirius interjected “I know we weren’t the best of friends, but we’ve definitely got some stuff on you two, and Alice is family.”

“The two of you are related?” Neville questioned, surprised

“Oh, only distantly; Sixth or Seventh cousins once removed, or something like that, but all Pureblood families are related in some way. The Longbottoms are mixed in there, somewhere, as well, although it’s further back, so I couldn’t tell you where.”

“Does that mean that the Potters are related to the Longbottoms and the Blacks?” Harry questioned, although he already knew the answer

“Yes, and the Lupins as well, although you would have to go back a number of generations to find the connection, and in several cases, it would probably be a case of the individual being several times removed.” Sirius responded

“Hmm.” Harry mused “Well anyway, Mrs., uh...Longbottom...”

“Alice, Harry, or...Aunt Alice, if...if you want. Neville said that you knew I was your godmother.” She ended, a hint of uncertainty in her voice

Harry gave her a genuine smile “Thank you. I’d like that. So, um...what do you think’s in the box?” pointing to the forgotten package

“I...honestly have no idea.” She admitted “Do you think it’d be okay to find out?”

Harry nodded

Slowly, and with the greatest of tenderness, she unwrapped the package, as if it were the most delicate thing in the world, never once tearing the paper

Harry saw a single tear come to her eye as she removed a white photo album, the size of the package, and decorated with moving images of lily flowers blossoming, and doves gracefully flying around. In the center was a wizarding picture of two girls, each with an arm around the others shoulder, laughing and waving at the camera. It was an unmistakable young Lily and Alice, no more then 17 or 18. Harry knew that the picture had been taken on the day of their graduation from Hogwarts.

Alice seemed to be in a daze, as another tear sprang to her eye. She was having a hard time trying not to cry. She just sat on the bed, the album in her lap. For a moment, all was still.

Harry broke it, by reaching over, and gently caressing one of the flowers, then one of the doves

“Aloma.” he whispered gently

That shook Alice out of her daze. It also caused Frank to look up curiously

“Ho...How did you know that?” she questioned, obviously startled

Harry shrugged “I read some of mum’s journals. She said that you never liked the name, but she always told you that the me...”

“The meaning made up for the name...yes. I’d forgotten.” She said slowly, also caressing the symbols

No one seemed to understand what was going on, except for perhaps Frank, but he didn’t say anything. Neville finally spoke up

“Wh...What does that mean, Mum?”

Alice was now completely out of her daze, and remembered that there were other people in the room. She shook her head, as if trying to clear it.

“Um...Aloma...it’s my...middle name. You see, after you...Aunt...” she hesitated, looking to Harry as if for confirmation that it was okay with him if she used that term

Harry just smiled, and gave her a tiny nod

She smiled, and continued “After your Aunt Lily and I became friends in our 2nd year, we started passing notes in between classes, since we were in different Houses. She was a Gryffindor and I was a Ravenclaw, but we...shared a passion for books and learning, among

other things. We had actually met in the Library. Anyway, over time, we developed our own little...code, I guess you could say. You know, a certain word or phrase had a hidden meaning.”

“But...what does that have to do with your name?” questioned Neville, still confused

“I’m getting there.” Alice smiled “Aside from the ‘code’, Lily never signed her name. Instead, she would draw a lily blossom in its place. Even as a 2nd year, she had figured out how to charm it to open and close.”

She let out a small chuckle “I admit I was a bit jealous of her ability to pick up on spells so quickly. She was also one of the most talented artists I’ve ever met. She made her pictures just...come alive, without magic.”

She shook her head “Sorry, off topic. Well, as a 12-year-old, since she signed her name with a flower, I wanted to have a symbol also. My first name didn’t mean anything...symbolic. Lily suggested I use the raven, since I was a Ravenclaw, but...I didn’t like the idea, so we went to my middle name ‘Aloma’. I had always thought it was a strange name, and I’d never really cared for it, but...we looked up the meaning, and found that it stemmed from Latin origins meaning...’dove’.”

She sighed heavily, before speaking again “Well...Lily thought it was perfect, so that became my symbol. She taught me how to draw it, since I had very little talent in art, then she taught me how to charm it to make it flap its wings. As we got older, we learned charms that made the symbols fly or move around the page, move around the page pointing out a series of words to relay a ‘secret’ message, or just spell out our names in loopy letters.”

She let out a lighter sigh “It...was just for fun, but it became our special way of communicating, even after Hogwarts.”

She fell silent again, as she gingerly opened the photo album. The first page, instead of a photograph, was a pencil drawing.

Alice let out a little gasp, as she stared at the picture. It was of a woman in a rocking chair, an infant baby held securely in her arms, sleeping peacefully. The picture wasn't charmed or anything, but it was incredibly lifelike. The inscription below read Alice and Neville-- February 16, 1981. At the bottom of the page was a single lily blossom, and the signature L. Potter.

Tears now streaked Alice's face, and Harry was also having a hard time choking back a sob

"She..." he swallowed "She really did do beautiful work." He managed

Alice smiled through her tears "Yes...she did. I didn't even know she did this picture. This must have been..." She seemed to be thinking "That must have been the week Frank and James were away on that Auror mission, and didn't want either one of us staying alone. I was only on desk duty after my maternity leave. Frank didn't want us both in the field, since we had Neville. I...I think you were on the mission as well, weren't you Sirius?"

Sirius looked up "You mean the first one Frank and James agreed to go on after Harry and Neville were born?"

Alice nodded

Sirius chuckled "Yeah, I went on it. All I heard the whole trip was 'Alice and Lily this' or 'Harry and Neville that'. I think they were afraid the four of you couldn't get along without them for 5 minutes, much less 72 hours."

Frank was looking a little embarrassed, but Alice just wore a smile

"You...you were an Auror too?" Neville asked, somewhat hesitantly

Sirius nodded "James and I both were. Honestly, I'm amazed we were even accepted into the program. We goofed around too much to have the acceptable school grades, but we scored high enough on our NEWTS, and well...despite everything, I suppose the names Potter and Black still carried a great deal of weight." Sirius' voice trailed off, bringing about another uncomfortable silence

Neville looked confused, but Harry understood what he meant, and redirected the conversation

“So, you were staying with mum?” Harry questioned

Alice nodded “This was an old rocking chair your mum had. It was passed down from her...um...I believe it was her great-great grandmother. She loved that thing so much. She would rock you to sleep every night in it. She...” Her voice faltered as she choked back a sob

Harry didn’t say anything, but simply placed a comforting hand on top of hers

She looked up, surprised by the gesture, but Harry just gave her a small smile, which, after a moment, she returned

“You remind me so much of her.” She said softly “She knew how to show true compassion also.”

Harry felt his cheeks grow hot, especially considering his audience. For a moment, he was actually rendered speechless, which was truly no small task

“I...uh...I think...that rocking chair was another thing she placed in the vault. I’m pretty sure I recognize the pattern on the back of it.”

“Probably. It’s quite unique.”

“Um, can...can we look at the rest of the album?” Harry questioned, still trying to regain his composure

The pain was still evident, but the light was slowly coming back to Alice’s eyes. “Of course.”

For the next few minutes, each page was thoroughly examined with the greatest of care. The three men, obviously curious, also gathered around Alice and the two kids, where they sat on the bed. After the drawing, came the actual photos, starting with pictures of Lily and

Alice as girls in their 2nd year, continuing through 7th year, pictures from their weddings (they had been each others bridesmaid), a series of miscellaneous pictures, such as the day Alice, Frank, James, and Sirius had become full fledged Aurors, and finally ending with pictures of them with Harry and Neville as babies. There were a great many stories connected with most of the pictures. Alice began most of them, but Frank, Sirius, and Remus interjected their own memories as well.

Harry was loving this! Even after all these years, he had never been able to get close to anyone who had really known his mother. Her memories and journals could only go so far. Sirius had died so quickly, and Remus had known his dad better than his mum. He'd never really had the chance to know Alice Longbottom the first time the cure had been created. The war had been raging, and friendships took a back burner, especially, it seemed, when it came to him.

As the group came to the last page, it was...strangely blank, with the exception of a single dove in the right hand corner. Harry could detect traces of a charm on it. Focusing on it, he detected that it was some kind of privacy charm.

"Why is it blank?" Neville questioned

"Blank?" Alice looked up confused "It's not..."

"Actually it is, Aunt Alice. If Neville can't see it either, it's probably charmed so that only you can see it. Is it a note or something?"

Alice was surprised by the boy's intuition, not to mention the use of the foreign name, but confirmed his suspicions "A letter, actually."

Oh, speaking of letters...Harry had almost forgotten the other items he'd brought with him.

"Care to share, Honey?" Frank questioned

Alice glanced over the letter "Maybe later." She said slowly

Harry internally smirked. He knew what that meant. AONK 'Adults only No Kids'. He figured it was about time he gave Neville some time to talk anyway. KONA 'Kids only No Adults.

He reached into his bag, and pulled out two letters. "Um...Aunt Alice." The name still sounded funny as he rolled it over his tongue.

She looked up from the letter "Yes?"

"This is also for you." Handing her one of the letters "And this one's for you." He said, turning towards Frank

"What's this?" Frank questioned, turning the envelope over in his hands

"Um, Mum and Dad wrote a bunch of letters right before they went into hiding, just...just in case. Mum, she...she said she felt like something was...'coming', I think is how she phrased it."

This made Remus and Sirius look up in surprise. This was one piece of information that Harry had neglected to mention.

"What do you mean, Harry?" Remus questioned, a hint of concern in his voice

Harry bit his lip, realizing his slip up. This wasn't a conversation he wanted to get into

"Uh, it...it was just in her journal." He stated slowly, trying to emphasize that that was all he wanted to say on the matter for the time being

Remus seemed to take the hint, and let the issue drop, at least for the moment, so Harry continued.

"Anyway, those letters are for the two of you."

Harry turned around, about to make an excuse to leave the room for a bit, but stopped in his tracks when he noticed Augusta standing next to the door. She had barely said two words since they had

entered the room. Her expression was hard, her arms folded across her chest, and she looked far from happy. In fact, her magic was similar to what McGonagall's had been after the article about Harry had come out, 'boiling'. Harry followed her gaze, and wasn't really surprised to find that it was directed at Sirius. Just to confirm his suspicions, he stole a glance at the mere surface of her mind. The anger he felt from her made him instantly shrink back. She was furious that Sirius was even there! In the quick glance he had managed, he was able to determine that she wasn't convinced of his innocence, and the fact that he was Bellatrix's cousin...

Harry shook his head. He should have expected something like this. She saw this as another threat to her family, but Alice and Frank obviously didn't have a problem with this. He internally sighed. How could he nip this in the bud, without being obvious. He could...no...maybe...or...Oh, to hell with subtlety. He wasn't about to let Augusta Longbottom ruin this. He would worry about explaining this away to Remus and Sirius later.

Harry walked straight up to the older woman, stopping less than a foot away from her. His action hadn't gone unnoticed by the occupants in the room, then he gave them a shock, or at least stunned them enough for the room to go silent.

He folded his hands in front of him, and gave her a slight bow. Whatever she was about to say instantly died in mid air.

"Madame Longbottom..." he started slowly "I...would like to apologize for any pain or anguish you may be feeling due to our...presence. I assure you, that that was not my intention when I requested this visit. I realize the number of rumors surrounding...my godfather...but I assure you that he is truly innocent, although I also realize that my words mean little."

The room was growing eerily cold, as the adults who were watching the scene unfold, and recognizing the reality of the situation. Harry continued speaking.

"I know that his...connection...with one of those who...tore your family apart so mercilessly must be incredibly unsettling, to put it

mildly. What happened to your family was...wrong on every single level, and nothing can replace the years you've lost or the pain you've all been forced to endure. I assure you that Sirius is truly remorseful of the pain his cousin caused you, however misguided, but..."

Harry paused, but not long enough to break the silence from the rest of the group

"but, in the end, he is not responsible for the actions of his cousin, any more than you are responsible for the actions of your brother." Harry added a hint of a threat in his tone. Augusta's face, who had been filled with surprise at Harry's actions, now paled a bit. 'If Frank or Alice found out what 'Uncle Algie' did to Neville, just to try and get him to show some sign of magic...'

"In the end, we can only be held responsible for our own actions, not those of others. To lay the blame at another's feet is a cruel injustice, no matter what the case may be. In your case, the only ones to blame are Bellatrix Lestrangle, Rodolphus Lestrangle, and Barty Crouch, Jr." he stated, somewhat forcefully "They, and they alone are responsible for your families tragedy, but...the way I see it, you have another chance. You have your son back, and your grandson has his parents back. Not all of us are that lucky!" his tone was incredibly icy, as his eyes flashed dangerously

He hadn't meant to become angry, and he felt himself losing control. He took a step back, but he was breathing heavily. He felt every eye in the room bearing into the back of his head. He knew he would really give himself away if he did lose control, or if he continued much longer. He had to rectify this situation.

Augusta wore an unreadable expression, but pain, confusion, and perhaps even a hint of fear were at least some of the emotions displayed. He sighed heavily, then started again.

"I apologize for my outburst, Madame Longbottom. It was rude and uncalled for. My only intention was to assure you that, despite what you may perceive, no one in this room poses a threat to your family, least of all Sirius, but I am at fault. Ego summisce effagito venia."

Now Augusta, along with the rest of the group, including Neville was staring at Harry like he'd just grown a second head! The phrase he had just uttered was Latin that roughly translated into I humbly plead forgiveness. It was a custom that was part of pureblood society, a spell or enchantment of sorts. If an individual believed they had wronged another, instead of having the one they wronged demand restitution through a duel or a form of payment, they had the option to perform a ritual known as Misericordia Indulgeo-The Mercy Pardon, as long as the wronged party hadn't demanded another form of compensation already. It was rarely used anymore, due to the fact that if the wronged party replied negatively and refused to accept the request, the other person owed the wronged person a life debt. Most people, especially purebloods, didn't like the idea of being indebted to someone, and most of them were too proud to admit that they were in the wrong in the first place. It was also, normally seen, as extending hand of friendship.

There was a long, drawn out silence, where everyone seemed to be waiting with baited breath. Augusta seemed at a loss for words. She was just staring at the boy in front of her. Harry just stood there, not moving a muscle; his face reverted back to an innocent mask.

After a long moment, Frank finally broke the silence.

"Mother..."he started slowly, a hint of warning in his voice "Don't you have something to say?"

She looked up, her unreadable expression still in place

"I...I..." Her voice faltered.

"Mo..."

She sighed heavily, before giving a tiny inclination of her head "Tui crimen diluoed."

The group seemed to let out a collective breath. It meant Your guilt is removed.

A small smile played on Harry's face. He gave another small bow. "Tui misericordia penetranter diligoed." (Your mercy is greatly valued.) A hint of magic swirled on the air, as the ritual confirmed that it was satisfied with both parties' statements, and closed the pact.

There was another pause, before Frank spoke again.

"Mother, is..." he seemed to be unsure as to what to ask. He finally decided on a question

"Is...is he right? Do you see Sirius as a threat?"

Augusta refused to meet his eyes, but Harry could see something of fear and guilt mixed in them.

Her words came slowly "I...you..." then her demeanor changed "You've seen the paper!" she snapped coldly

Harry glanced over at his godfather, and was disturbed to see him slumped in a chair, incredibly pale, just watching the scene unfold.

"Mother, I..." Frank started, before Alice laid a gentle hand on her husband's shoulder

"Augusta..." she said softly "We knew Sirius before all this and we have read the papers. I don't believe we see him as a threat. He wasn't like his cousin back then, and I don't believe he is today."

Harry turned around, true surprise on his face. He couldn't believe that his godmother was defending Sirius like this, especially having not known him for over 10 years.

"I have to agree, Mother. As close as he and James were..." Frank shook his head "I'm sorry, Mother, but I don't share your misgivings."

Augusta looked unconvinced, and somewhat angry, although that emotion quickly disappeared by Alice's next question.

"Augusta, what...what did he mean by 'you not being responsible for your brothers actions'?"

Harry sighed. Only a mother would pick up on a phrase like that, especially after everything else that had been said. Augusta's face had gone pale, as she unconsciously looked over at Neville, then back to the ground. Neville also wore a look of fear, and he was biting his bottom lip.

"I...um..." Augusta started, but she couldn't seem to find the words.

Then, abruptly, and without warning, she turned on her heel, and disappeared out the door.

There was silence in the room, before Alice spoke up

"Sirius, I...I am so sorry. I had no idea she felt..."

Sirius was still pale, but spoke up "No, I...I was hesitant to come, but..." he sighed heavily "I...I wanted to offer up an apology, on...on behalf of the entire Black family." His voice was shaky, but he continued with a speech, he had obviously thought out "I am thoroughly disgusted by...what happened. The Black family owes you a debt for the pain one of its members forced you to endure. All of the Black family resources are at your disposal, should you ever need them, and I...I'll help you in any way I can. I...I can't even begin to apologize for what my cousin..." his voice faltered, in a violent shudder

Alice and Frank looked at each other, then back at Sirius, who was looking a bit like death warmed over.

Alice gave him a genuine smile "Thank you, Sirius. It's really un...thank you." Both she and Frank, as purebloods, knew better than to rebuke his offer. It was a custom among pureblood society for a Head of House to offer restitution for a family members crimes, if they were unable or unwilling, which, in Bellatrix's case was something of both.

There was another pause, before Alice spoke again.

"Harry..." she started

Harry grimaced

"I'm...not sure how you knew what Augusta was feeling, or why you decided..." she sighed "I guess it doesn't matter. The only thing I don't understand...the only part of your...speech...what did you mean about her brother?"

"I..." Harry bit his lip, looking over at a pale Neville. He slowly shook his head "I'm...sorry, but that's...it's not my place to tell you. You...you really need to hear that from..." he hesitated "Augusta." He finally finished

"Harry..." Remus started, a hint of a warning in his voice

Harry bit his lip. Despite his actual age, or perhaps because of it, he knew it wasn't a good idea to defy an adult's request, and to defy two of them...

"Please, Uncle Moony..." hoping the name would help a bit "It's...it's really not my place. I...shouldn't have brought it up...any of it." He added "I...I was out of line. I apologize."

Remus gave his nephew a calculating look "You've already done that, Harry, but be that as it may..."

Frank interjected "Remus, its...its okay. Let's just leave it for now."

Remus sighed, but backed off

Harry knew this was good time to bow out.

"Uh...Uncle Moony?"

Remus looked up

"Would it be alright if I went to get something to drink?"

Remus seemed to understand, and nodded "That's fine, Harry. Just don't be gone too long."

"Thanks. Um...Neville, you want to come? I've only been here...once, and I really don't know my way around."

Neville, still a bit ashen, looked at his parents "Is...is it okay?"

Alice looked at Frank, then nodded "Of course. Don't go too far, though."

With a quick nod, both boys quickly exited the ward. As the door shut behind them, Neville let out a shuttering breath.

"Th...thanks for not telling about...ya know." He said shakily

Harry nodded, a bit remorseful "Yeah. I'm...sorry. I shouldn't have brought it up. I'm not sure why I did."

"Yeah, well..." Neville seemed at a loss for words

"Come on. Let's go get something. I think I remember a coffee shop or something here, right."

Neville nodded "Yeah, its a few floors up."

"Lead the way."

Back in the ward

"Alice, Frank, I am...so sorry about what just happened. I had no idea that Harry would...I didn't even know he knew that particular custom, or...and I have idea how he knew what Augusta..."

"Remus, its okay." Frank interjected, with a hint of amusement "I'm...actually impressed. I've...never seen anyone put my mother in her place like that. I'm still confused as to how he read her like that..."

"I think we all are." Sirius added

"I doubt even my father could've pulled something like that off. My grandmother, her mother...maybe, but..." Frank now, definitely wore an amused look

"I assure you, we'll get to the bottom of it." Remus stated

"Oh, Remus" Alice cut in "Don't be too hard on Harry. He didn't really do anything wrong, and he did apologize, and at the risk of a life debt. I'd say he's punished himself enough for one day."

Remus sighed, but didn't say anything. After a moment

"And Sirius...I want to assure you that you are not at fault for what happened, and I..." he looked over at his wife "we certainly don't blame you. Harry was right. You can only take responsibility for your own actions."

"That's right, Sirius, and from what we've read in the Prophet, you've suffered as well. Ten years in..." her voice shuttered "Azkaban. I...I didn't like going there as an Auror, much less..." she shuttered again

Even though Azkaban had been brought up, Sirius was starting to regain some of his color

"Th...thank you. That means a lot."

There was another bout of silence, before Remus spoke.

"Um...I...I don't mean to sound...well...I mean..." he was stumbling over his words

Sirius interjected "What I think Remus is trying to say, is...um...how... how did this happen? I...it...it was supposed to be impossible. A...a cure for the c..." his voice also faltered

Frank actually perked up a bit "A cure for the cruciatus? Neither did anyone else."

"So...how..."

“It’s...a long story.”

Meanwhile, up in the coffee shop

Neither boy had said much on their way up, but now they were sitting in the back of the shop with butter beers, and several packs of wizard candy. There were very few patrons in the small shop. Harry wasn’t sure how to start, so decided on a safe topic.

“So...you said you had a pretty good Christmas?”

This made Neville light up “Yeah, it was...the best! Just the fact that we were together...but then...” Neville then gave a detailed overview of everything that had happened starting with the day Augusta had come and pulled him out of school, to the days following, and Christmas Day.

Harry then went into his own Christmas, starting with the last day of school and a prank that had been pulled after Neville left, a few pieces of Sirius’ trial, going down to Hogsmeade, and his own Christmas Day, well, parts of it.

“So...your godfather, he’s...really innocent?” Neville asked hesitantly

Harry sighed, a bit perturbed. He hated the general consensus that Sirius was guilty, but he took a deep breath, and focused on the fact that Neville was only 11.

“Yeah, he’s really innocent. The guilty one was Peter Pettigrew. He...” Harry stopped, as his voice grew low. That rat’s name left a foul taste in his mouth.

“Anyway, it doesn’t matter. Sirius is free now. So...what about you? How are you doing? I mean...stuff like this just doesn’t happen everyday. It’s not something you really know how to deal with.” Harry was trying to give Neville some reassurance, that...whatever he may be feeling was perfectly acceptable

"I...I'm...not sure what to feel." Neville admitted, reluctantly, a waver in his voice "Sometimes I'm just glad that they're getting better, and then other times..." his voice faltered, but Harry was...fairly certain he knew what he was about to say

"And then other times, you really hate them." He said softly

Neville looked up, startled "Ho...I...Yes." He admitted, a stricken look on his face "Ho...How did you know?" he choked out, before burying his face in his hands "I'm a horrible person, aren't I?" half a sob escaping his lips

The few people that were in the room were looking over due to Neville's outburst. Without a second thought, Harry silently put up several privacy and notice-me-not charms, with the tiniest flick of his wrist, so the other patrons wouldn't notice. After a second, they all went back to what they had been doing, as if the boys weren't even there. Now, Harry turned his attention back to an almost sobbing Neville. Apparently, Harry's lack of response seemed to confirm the boy's fears.

Harry shook his head "Neville...you are not a horrible person for feeling hatred towards your parents."

"But..." Neville tried

"No! You are not a horrible person because of this. You asked me how I knew...it's because I...I feel the same way sometimes...about my parents."

Neville looked up, surprise consuming his face "But...your parents...they..."

"I know. They loved me. They protected me. They died for me! It just makes the feelings 10 times worse. I hate myself, but..." Harry took a deep breath

"You see, I learned a long time ago that...well...there's a big difference between actually hating a person, and hating that person's actions. You see, I...I don't hate my parents. They gave me

everything. I wouldn't be alive today if it weren't for them, but...that doesn't mean that I have to like their actions. They abandoned me, made me an orphan, then I had to go live the Dursley's because of that, who abused me, starved me...hated me. They tried to squash the magic out of me, as they so eloquently put it, and that all happened, because my parents left me! I hate the fact that they did that."

Neville looked solemn "So, its...it's the difference between hating the persons...actions, and hating the actual person?" he asked quietly

Harry nodded "Exactly. You see, there will be people that you truly hate, both there actions and the actual person. I hate Voldemort in that way! He murdered my parents, along with thousands of others. He is a truly evil person. He didn't care how many people he hurt, if it meant that his plans were a success. He h...had no remorse or compassion for anyone, and no matter what anyone did or said, he wasn't going to change. My parents weren't like that. I don't hate them in that way, it's just...those types of people..." Harry paused, shaking his head

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to go off like that."

Neville glanced up "No, I...th...thank you. I..."

"Neville, your feelings are valid. It's okay to feel angry, hurt, sad...you can't help how you feel, and if you keep them bottled up, it just gets worse...believe me." Harry muttered the last part under his breath, before continuing "Just...don't let anyone tell you different. Don't let anyone tell you that you shouldn't feel a certain way...but, here's the key, talk them out! Cry, scream, throw things, whatever you have to do, just don't try to deal with it all yourself. I think we all have times when we just...need to rant to somebody. You see, I..." Harry paused "I have this friend I met, before...before I came to Hogwarts, and anytime I get really upset or just need someone to...let all my frustration out on, he'll just...listen. I don't have to pretend that...I'm happy when I'm not, or okay with something when I don't think it is. It...really helps, sometimes, just to deal with your feelings, get them out in the open. If...if you ever need someone like that...I'll always have an ear open."

Neville looked up, surprised, but somewhat...comforted at the same time "Thanks." He murmured, then he seemed to think of something else

"Um...Harry, what...what did you mean about...I mean, you and gran...what..."

Harry sighed "I shouldn't have said that. It wasn't my place."

"But, is he...I mean..."

Harry nodded solemnly "Yeah, Sirius is...Bellatrix Lestranger's cousin. Her maiden name is Black."

Neville's face went hard "Does...does..."

Harry shook his head "I swear to you Neville, Sirius would never do anything to hurt you or your family. He hates his cousin, the same way I hate Voldemort...pr...probably the same way you hate her." He added softly

Neville now wore a look of fury "She...She..." he sputtered angrily

"I know." Harry said sympathetically "And as I said, it's okay to hate her...but don't let the hate consume you. Don't let it become your reason for living. If all you focus on is the hatred or the idea of getting revenge...she wins."

Neville's face contorted, but Harry just sighed

"Don't let that happen. Sirius said that, even before she went to Azkaban, she was crazy...insane. She loved causing pain. She got joy seeing other people suffer, and her favorite...curse was the cruciatus."

Neville's eyes widened, but he remained silent

“Don’t feel bad about feeling pain or anger, but remember that it’s only supposed to be a stage in your life. It may be a long stage, but it shouldn’t define it, just...don’t let her win.”

Neville looked up. His face was slightly ashen, but a fierce determination was slowly surfacing. It was the first time, since Halloween, that Harry had gotten a glimpse of the true strength he knew his old friend possessed, and his next words confirmed he was right.

“I won’t.” Neville declared, as a wave of magic rippled through the room

Meanwhile, in the ward

“So...St. Mungos didn’t create this potion?”

Frank shook his head “No. As much as we’ve been told, it wasn’t even a hospital. It was some private company.”

“Augusta said that some guy just approached her and Maria, uh Roberts, Head of the Long-term care ward, out of the blue one day, requesting permission for a trial run on this potion for the both of us. She refused at first, but then some other guy came, and convinced her to a three month trial, and it...worked.”

Remus and Sirius both wore looks of amazement.

“And you remember...everything?”

Alice nodded “There’s a few things that are still hazy, but, even the last 10 years, it...it was like...like being a prisoner in my own body. I could see and hear everything, just...no control.” She shuttered slightly “I’ve never felt so...helpless. I...”

“It’s...okay. You don’t have to talk about it. I...Azkaban was the same...Well...” Sirius wasn’t sure what to say

Alice gave him a small smile "Sorry, just a bit of self-pity leaking through."

"Well, I'd say you're definitely entitled." Remus commented "So, how long are you supposed to be in here? You said something about 3 months?"

"Um, that's just the trial period my mother agreed to. It's actually supposed to be 6 months, then the foundation wants to re-evaluate, just to make sure the potion worked properly. If everything goes well, we should be out of here by mid to late March. Honestly, though, I'm ready to get out of here now, and never look back." Frank stated, a hint of cynicism in his voice

Remus let out a small chuckle "I can't say I blame you. To be cooped up in here...do they let you out at all?"

Frank shook his head "Not yet. I'm trying to talk mum and the Healers into letting us take Neville back to school once it starts up again. She's insisting on taking him back personally and getting Dumbledore to agree to let him come spend time with us on evenings and weekends."

"Well, surely that wouldn't be a problem, would it?"

Frank shrugged "Allowing Neville to come visit? Probably not. But my mother seems to think we'll break if we so much as take a step outside this hospital wing."

Sirius let out a chuckle. Remus shot him a dirty look.

Sirius laughed again "Sorry about that. I was just thinking back to when we were kids. Remember when our mothers used to get us together for play-dates; only they called it 'social training'." Heavy sarcasm filling the last two words

Frank snickered "Yeah. Remember that time when you and James were invited over for tea, along with your mothers? I don't think we were more than 7 or 8."

“Tea, my foot.” Sirius scoffed “It was just an excuse for our mothers to get together and gossip. Remember the prank we pulled?”

“How could I forget? I was grounded for over a month for pulling that little stunt...that you two talked me into.” Frank stated accusingly, although a hint of a smile played on his face

“Oh, come on. You were so into it. Besides, wasn’t it worth it to see your mother’s hair change into long yellow lion’s fur, complete with a thick mane all around her face?”

Remus was trying to suppress a laugh, while Alice looked murderous.

“You did WHAT?” she demanded sternly

Frank held up his hands “Hey, his mother’s hair was replaced with blue, green, and red parrot feathers.”

“Oh, but I think James’ mum was the best. Her hair was replaced with those long Peacock feathers. It actually didn’t look bad...compared to the others.” He snickered “I think it got him off with a mere two month grounding compared to the lifetime she was threatening.”

“How’d you pull that off, anyway?” Remus questioned

“Just a couple of tablets from Zonko’s. Slipped it into that tea they had. They never knew what hit ‘em.”

“That was horrible!” Alice reprimanded “You should both be ashamed of yourselves.”

Sirius just shrugged “We were only seven, and anyway, it was far from the worst prank we pulled on them. One time we...”

“NO, no, no. I don’t think I want to hear it. And you better not go around giving Neville any ideas...or Harry, for that matter. There genes will be working against them enough, as it is.” She huffed

This elicited a round of laughter from all three men, and even a small smile could be seen on Alice’s face.

As the laughter died away, all expressions were much more relaxed than they had been a few minutes ago. Remus was the first to speak, and redirected the conversation a bit.

“So...is it true? From the letters Harry showed us, it indicated that they were going to release this to the press tomorrow.”

“Unfortunately.” Frank huffed

“Oh, its not gonna be that bad.” Alice soothed

“I just don’t like the idea of all that publicity.”

“It’s not tha...okay, it is that annoying.” Sirius agreed “But...at least it’s for something positive instead of negative.”

Frank sighed “I don’t think I’d mind so much, if it weren’t for Neville. I mean...” he hesitated “Well, we’re just getting to know him again, and he just started school this year, and having to deal with the press and publicity on top of that. It’s just...a lot to handle, and not to mention the kids at school. Kids can be anywhere from annoying to downright cruel, especially when everybody knows your name.”

Remus nodded “I understand your concerns, Frank. Harry’s had to deal with that this year, too, being the-Boy-Who-Lived, and all. He doesn’t come right out and say it, but the way he writes about it in his letters you can tell that it annoys him,...but he does manage to deal with it, and so far there haven’t been any major problems.”

“And Neville will learn to deal with it, too. He’ll have to at some point, anyway. Besides, I think its better that it’s before school starts back, rather than after. It’ll give people, including the kids and his teachers, time to wrap their mind around this, as well as time to let some of the newness wear off, and adjust to the idea.” Alice stated

“People aren’t just gonna be able to ‘wrap their minds’ around the idea in the week and a half before school starts. Besides, if the foundation had its way, it wouldn’t be released publicly at all, which I whole heartedly agree with.” Frank argued

“This is a major medical creation! It can’t not be released to the public.” Alice countered

“Why not?” Frank demanded “We weren’t the first recipients of this potion, and we certainly won’t be the last.”

“So we just show up in Diagon Alley one day, and say, what...surprise?”

“Nah.” Frank said, shaking his head, amusement in his voice “I say we grab Neville, and just move to Australia. A little sand, a little sun. It’ll be fabulous.”

Alice sighed “Frank Longbottom, stop messing around. Our life is here.”

“Our life was here. We wouldn’t have one if it weren’t for the foundation.”

At this point, the conversation was becoming a bit heated. Remus felt that it was a good time to try and run interference.

“Um, so, what’s...what’s this foundation you keep talking about?”

Alice and Frank looked up, slight embarrassment showing on their faces for arguing in front of guests. Alice was still trying to regain her composure, but spoke up

“Uh, it’s the...company that’s responsible for the creation of the potion. The...Unity Foundation, I think, or something like that.”

Now Remus’ eyes widened, and Sirius looked up, curiously

“Remus, isn’t that...” but Remus didn’t let him finish his sentence

“Yes, yes, it is.” He answered hastily, before redirecting his attention “Are you sure? The ‘Mark of Unity Foundation’?”

Alice nodded “I think that’s right. Does that mean something to you?”

“Uh...yeah, its...where I work. Are...are you sure they're behind this?” his voice was filled with confusion

“That's what we've been told.” Frank answered “We met with one of their lawyers yesterday. Had to sign several contracts in regards to this.”

Now Remus' interest was on high alert “Was...was the lawyers name...McAlistor?” he asked, almost hesidently

Alice gave a thoughtful look, but shook her head “No...but it started with an M. M...Mayes, I think. Or was it Myers? Frank?”

“It was Mayes. Myers was that other guy Mum mentioned. Do you recognize the names, Remus?”

Remus nodded, still a bit stunned “Yes. Myers is...my boss, well one of them, and I know Glenn Mayes through a...mutual friend.”

“CoughGirlfriendCough.” Sirius got out

Remus sent him a death glare, but nodded “Yes, one of his law partners and I are currently dating.” Remus admitted “But that's not the point. The Unity Foundation; you said something about Myers. You mean Jacob Myers, right?”

“I believe that's the signature we saw. We were told he holds the paten to the potion.”

“Signature? You mean you haven't met him?”

Frank shook his head “No, we haven't met anyone directly from the Foundation, aside from the lawyer, and he stated that the Foundation were merely clients. Mum met with two of them, initially; Myers and...Lawson, I think his name was. They're the ones who talked her into the trial, but we've never met them.”

Remus was reeling just a bit, trying to process all the information. He was slowly forming questions.

“What...do...do you know if anyone else knows...within the Foundation, I mean?”

Alice shook her head “I don’t think so. The lawyer kept assuring us that everything would be kept under wraps, until St. Mungos gave an official press release. Apparently Mr. Myers was quite insistent on this point. That’s what Frank meant when he said that the Foundation had little desire in making this public. I got the impression, if our story wasn’t so widely known, he would’ve insisted on keeping it quiet.”

“I’ve only met Lawson once, and I’ve never met Myers, but I guess they’re not doing this for publicity, then?” Sirius questioned

“Umh umh.” Alice answered “From what we’ve been told, that’s the last thing he wants. Would you have any idea as to why that is, Remus?”

Remus shrugged “From what I do know, and my personal experience with him, he’s...not one to take advantage of someone...or their circumstances for personal gain. I don’t know him that well. Richard’s the daily supervisor and VP of the Foundation. Jacob’s President and CEO, but only shows up three or four times a month, usually for major business meetings, or to deal with some other issue.”

“What kind of man is he?” Alice questioned “What kind of person does something like this, and desire...nothing in return?”

“What do you mean nothing?” Sirius question, his curiosity also spiked

“I mean...nothing. No publicity, no money, no...payment of any kind.”

“We even had to sign several contracts to that effect. No money or valuables would ever be demanded from us as payment, yet if something were to go wrong either now within the next three months of treatment, or later, due to after effects of the potion, that they’ll pay for whatever’s needed.” Frank explained

"It sounds a bit suspicious." Sirius commented "Like they expect there to be problems."

"I...don't think so. Augusta got her lawyer to look them over, before we signed anything. He claimed that they were written more in our best interest, rather than the companies. He said it was rare to ever see contracts like these, especially when they were drawn up by the other party."

"Well, I will admit, the small amount of time I have spent with Jacob, he has proven to be a very...unique person...to say the least."

"What do you mean?" Frank questioned curiously

"Just...what you said about the contracts, it...sounds like him." Remus stated slowly

"In what way?" Frank pressed

Remus ran his hand through his hair, a thoughtful expression on his face "He...does seem to care about others much more than himself. One of our...programs is a...well, muggles would call it an orphanage, but its really more of a 'safe house'. We take in magical children that are either orphaned, homeless, who have been abused, whatever the case may be, and simply care for them...and he doesn't like to make that known either. Another thing I've witnessed, is...usually about once a month on one of his visits, he'll go around to each department, and speak to every single employ, usually asking them how they're doing, if there's any problems, and not just within the company, but about their personal lives as well, always asking if there's something he can help with, yet...he never brings up his own personal life or problems."

Remus took a breath, having said all that rather quickly, before continuing

"I've just...never met anyone like him, much less had an employer like him."

“Well, it certainly sounds like he’s genuine...but it still doesn’t explain his motives. If he’s as private as you say, perhaps it’s just something that will remain a mystery or perhaps they’ll be revealed over time.” Frank commented

“Yes, well whatever the case, I’ll always be grateful. We have a second chance at life, and I don’t intend on wasting a minute of it.” Alice declared

“Speaking of which, will you be going back to the Ministry, once this is all said and done?” Remus asked

Frank and Alice looked at each other, then Frank shook his head

“We really haven’t gotten that far. No one in the Ministry knows yet.”

This surprised both Sirius and Remus

“Are you serious?” Remus questioned

Alice nodded

“Boy, you have managed to keep this under wraps. I’m impressed.”

“How about you, Sirius? Are you going back to the Ministry?”

Sirius sighed “They...offered to put me through the Auror training again, and reinstate my title once the training was complete, but...I turned them down.”

“Any reason why?” Alice questioned gently

“Well, I didn’t need the money, now that I’m Head of the Black Family, and have access to the accounts and such, but more than that, I just...got the feeling that the offer was more of a public show on the part of the Ministry trying to save face. I’m fairly certain they were hoping I’d say ‘no’, and frankly I was more than happy to oblige. There would always be those who would doubt the truth of my innocence. I didn’t want to...go back to a place where I’d be fighting to prove myself every step of the way.”

Alice nodded in understanding, sending him a sympathetic look

“Any idea what you’ll do now?” Frank asked

Sirius shrugged “Focus on trying to get my life back, I guess, or...create a new one. Concentrate on Harry more then anything.”

Alice nodded her approval “And your other...family?”

“I received an owl from my cousin, Andromeda, the other day requesting to meet. She and her husband live out in Windsor now. I don’t really expect to hear from anyone else. Bel...” his voice faltered

“Its okay, Sirius.” Alice assured him “We’ve both had a lot of years to deal with this...whether or not anyone knew it.”

Frank nodded in agreement

Sirius sighed, but went on “Bellatrix won’t be getting out, and I...seriously doubt Narcissa will have anything to do with me, considering her husband, not that I really want to have anything to do with the Malfoy family, and I’m the last of the direct line. Honestly, I’m not that thrilled about taking over as Head, but I really don’t have much choice. If I don’t accept, I would have to deal with the Malfoy’s, considering Narcissa’s son is the next born male who’s entitled to inherit, once he comes of age, and Lucius would manage it for him, until such time. Just the thought of that; its...” he let out a shudder “repulsive.”

Out in the Hallway

Neville and Harry were now making their way back through the hospital. Harry was glad he had come. He had been right in his hunch that Neville desperately needed someone to talk to. After a while, Harry finally looked at his watch, and was shocked to see that more then an hour and a half had already passed. He was surprised that a

search party hadn't been sent out yet. During a lull in the conversation, Harry suggested that they start back.

Right before they reached the door, Neville stopped him.

"Um, Harry, I just...just...Thanks. I really..." Neville didn't seem to know what to say

Harry just smiled "Don't mention it. That's what friends are for; besides we have a lot in common. You know, maybe...maybe my mum was right."

Neville looked confused "What do you mean?"

"Well, what your mum said, about us thinking we were brothers. Maybe we're destined to be friends."

Neville reddened a bit, but managed a smile "Ma...maybe you're right."

Harry chuckled "I hope so. You know, if things ever...become too stressful, or you just need a place to get away for a while, you're always welcome to come over."

"Um...thanks." He replied softly

Harry chuckled again "Come on. Let's go see if they even missed us."

As they entered the ward, they could hear a low conversation going on across the room.

Harry cleared his throat, alerting the adults to their return. He thankfully noticed that Augusta had yet to return.

"Harry, Neville, you're back. Did you have a nice talk?" Alice questioned knowingly

Neville reddened again, but Harry just smiled and nodded.

“Um, Uncle Remus; I don’t know if you know, but its 11:30. Weren’t you going to stop by and see Ms. Karin before you went to work?”

Remus hastily looked at his watch

“Oh, Frank, Alice, I am so sorry. Time had just slipped away. I do need to be at work in an hour.”

“Of course, Remus. We’re glad all three of you were able to come.”

“Yes.” Frank agreed “Sirius, I apologize again for my mother. I hope it won’t deter you from coming around again.”

“Don’t worry.” Harry piped up “I won’t give them much of a choice.”

This caused most of the adults to lightly chuckle

“Oh, you won’t, will you?” Remus questioned “How about if you’re grounded?”

“Remus!” Alice reprimanded “Harry, let me know if these guys are too hard on you. I’ll straighten them out.” She only half joked

Harry flashed her a smile “Thanks Aunt Alice”

“And do feel free to come around any time. You’re always welcome.”

After a round of ‘goodbyes’, the group left the room, and made their way to the hospital public floo.

“Sirius, are you still going to Gringotts?” Remus questioned

Sirius nodded “Hopefully it won’t take me more then an hour or two. I hope not that long.” He said, rolling his eyes “But then I’ll stop by and pick Harry up.”

“Hello! I’m right here.” Harry stated, a bit put out for being ignored

“You need to tread lightly.” Remus stated firmly “I haven’t decided how much trouble you’re in yet.”

Harry frowned “I didn’t do anything wrong.” He argued, even though he knew it wasn’t quite true, at least the not ‘doing anything’ part

“That remains to be seen.” Remus declared “Sirius, you remember where to floo?”

Sirius nodded

“Okay, we’ll see you in a bit. Come on, Harry. We’re going to go see Karin.”

Three ‘Whooshes’ later, the trio was gone.

Harry and Remus stepped out into a lush waiting room in one of the most prestigious Lawyer offices within London. The secretary immediately recognized Remus, and informed him that Karin currently had company, but that he could go on back.

They made their way down the hallway, and opened the door. As the two entered the office, they heard voices.

“But you have to come, Karin. It’s a family tradition.” The voice insisted, sharply

“I can’t, Mother. I’ve already made plans.” Karin responded firmly “Besides, I think we need some new traditions, besides gossiping about each other as soon someone turns their back.” She huffed

“Please, Aunt Karin.” Pleaded another voice “It’s no fun without you.”

Harry recognized the voice this time. It was one that had taunted him off and on for six years.

Karin's voice became considerably softer as she answered "I'm sorry, Pansy, but I do have plans." She replied gently "Besides, won't Draco be there?"

Pansy folded her arms across her chest "He's nothing but a pest." She huffed, matching her aunt's tone from a moment ago.

Harry let out an involuntary snicker at the comment, knowing that Draco pretty much felt the same way. It wasn't that loud, but enough to halt the conversation and make the women look towards the door.

Karin appeared startled "R...Remus, you're..." she looked at her watch "Oh." Realizing that it was later then she thought

"If this is a bad time..." Remus started

"No, no. Please, come in. We're finished here. Mother, you have my final word. Perhaps we can do lunch or something this weekend, but I'm booked for New Years." She stated firmly

But the older woman no longer had her attention on Karin. Instead she had turned it to the visitors, well Remus, considering Harry was half hidden behind his uncle.

"And just who are you?" the stern voice, demanded

Remus was slightly startled, but quickly shook it off

"Remus Lupin, Ma'am. You must be Helena Parkinson. It's a pleasure to meet you."

He held out his hand, but the woman didn't take it. After a moment, Remus lowered it, wearing a look that said he hadn't really expected her to take it in the first place.

"Lupin? From the newspapers?" she questioned sharply, her dark eyes boring into him as if scrutinizing his very soul

"One in the same." He replied evenly

“Here to have my daughter free another convicted murderer, are you?” she hissed

“MOTHER! Leave, Now!” Karin nearly shouted

“Karin, we’ll come back later. This isn’t a good time.” Remus placed a hand on Harry’s shoulder, leading him towards the door, before a voice decided to interject

“Potter! What are you doing here?!” Pansy barked accusingly

“Pansy!” Karin reprimanded “Where are your manners?”

Harry raised an eyebrow. Pansy had manners?

“Wait, Harry...Potter?” Helena questioned, turning her harsh glare on Harry, although Harry detected a hint of curiosity in her gaze as well. He felt her eyes travel from his face to his scar. Harry decided the best thing was to just keep his mouth shut. After all, he was still in trouble from the last time he’d opened it in front of a Pureblood Matriarch.

“Yes, Mother. Now stop gawking at him like one of your trophies.” Karin stated, irritably

“Karin Alondra! How dare you talk to me like that!” Her mother chastised, turning on her daughter, sharply

Harry wasn’t quite sure how it’d happened, but in an instant, Remus was by her side.

“Mrs. Parkinson, your daughter has asked you to leave twice. For the time being, I suggest you comply with her wishes.” His voice was a low growl, with a hint of a threat in the air

Unfortunately, Helena Parkinson seemed unfazed by this.

“And just who do you think you are to tell me what to do?” she demanded, taking on a superior tone

“Actually, Mother, he...I...” she was stumbling over words, before looking as if coming to a decision

“Oh, Bloody Hell!” she huffed furiously

Then, without warning, she threw her arms around Remus’ neck, clamping her lips onto his in a fiery kiss!

Harry clapped a hand over his mouth to stifle a sound that was somewhere between shock and amusement!

Pansy had let out a tiny ‘gasp’, and the look on Helena Parkinson’s face was priceless. It was somewhere between fury and shock, although not for the same reason as Harry’s.

The look on Remus’ face was fairly amusing as well. He was so stunned at first, he didn’t seem to know what to do, but he quickly brushed it off, and returned the kiss with just as much fervor and passion, wrapping his arms around her, pulling her close.

For a moment, silence reigned...well, with the exception of the small moans coming from Remus and Karin as their kisses deepened, their passion became more vocal, and their need more evident.

Harry hid a smile, and couldn’t help but think that this was slightly inappropriate, considering that there were two children in the room...Yes, Helena and Pansy were much too immature to witness this.

Harry let out a tiny chuckle at that thought, but instantly regretted it, as it seemed to have drawn Helena out of her state of shock.

“KARIN ALONDRA PARKINSON! STOP THAT THIS INSTANT!”

Rather than immediately complying, she held the kiss for a long moment, letting out one final moan, before reluctantly pulling away, the sense of touch, undesirably lost. Harry could see the sense of loss also mirrored in his uncle’s eyes.

Karin slowly turned towards her mother, gently licking her lips as she did.

“Yes...mother.” She purred smoothly

Helena was livid! She looked primed and ready to kill, Remus as her prey.

“You ought to be ashamed of yourself! Acting this way! And in front of...” she paused, remember something

She spun around “PANSY.” She snapped “Out in the Hall.”

“But...”

“NOW!” she ordered harshly

Pansy let out a little squeak, and without another word, turned and fled the room

Remus, who had regained a bit of his composure, now looked at Harry.

“Why don’t you go wait outside, too.” It wasn’t a request

Harry put on a puppy dog face, and stuck out his bottom lip.

“Aww, but I like fireworks...Especially when something blows up.” He whined

Harry swore that Karin turned something of a laugh into a cough, and Remus’ expression said that he was somewhere between annoyed and amused.

“GO!” he ordered, pointing towards the door

Harry smirked, as he turned, and quickly followed Pansy’s exit. As he walked through the door, he felt a silencing ward go up, and the permanent privacy charms activate that were already a part of Karin’s office

Harry was a bit disappointed that he hadn't got to stay. Remus and Karin had been waiting to officially announce their relationship to Karin's family, and knew that this wasn't anywhere close to the way they had planned it.

As he entered the hallway, he found Pansy sitting on one of the leather chairs in the hall, her head slightly lowered. She vaguely looked up as the door clicked shut, but didn't say anything.

Harry wasn't sure what to do, so he just sat down in the chair in front of her. For a moment, there was nothing but silence, then Harry stuck his hand out.

"Hi. I don't think we've officially met. I'm Harry."

It was obvious that this was the last thing Pansy had expected. For a moment, she just stared at him like he was crazy, before reverting back to the smug look Harry knew all too well.

"I know who you are, Potter." She drawled

Unfazed, Harry just chuckled, lowering his hand. "Yes, I suppose so. Well, I guess we've got a bit of a wait then."

Pansy looked up "What do you mean, Potter?" she asked forcefully

Harry shrugged "Just after what happened in there. I'd...uh...say you're grandmothers, probably, having a fit, right about now. I'm guessing she won't be ready to leave 'till she's had her say."

Pansy frowned "Wh...What did happen in...there." She asked hesitantly

Harry got the feeling that the girl in front of him felt as if it were a crime or betrayal to even be talking to 'Harry Potter, Savior of the Wizarding World, and Hero of the Light. He couldn't entirely fault her, considering who her family was, as well as her upbringing.

Harry smiled "Um...I guess that's your Aunts way of breaking the news of who she's...dating."

"D...Dating?" Pansy half questioned, uncertainty in her voice

Harry chuckled "Surely you were able to surmise that from that little...display in there?" amusement in his voice

"Well, I...uh...Wha...Who...Who was that?" she finally got out

"You heard his name. Surely you read the Prophet...especially when your aunt's mentioned." He stated, as if it were the most obvious thing in the world

"Well...I..." she seemed at a loss

Harry sighed "His name's Remus Lupin. He's my Uncle, and your Aunt's boyfriend. Does that answer your question satisfactorily?" a stiffness in his voice

"Um..." she still seemed overcome with confusion, but after a moment, asked another question

"Why are you here?" she blurted out

Harry looked at her, an eyebrow raised, wondering if he should even dignify that with a response. He decided...in the pursuit of peace...he would.

"Because...I live with my uncle...I'm 11-years-old, and if he leaves me alone too long, I like to blow up the house." Holding a straight face through every word.

The look on her face was priceless.

Harry then went from serious mode, back to one of amusement.

Harry laughed "Just kidding. I don't blow up the whole house. Just the couch, usually...and occasionally the tv or radio." He joked

Pansy just stared at him like he was crazy

Harry shook his head "Sorry, I'm just joking. In truth, I'm just too young to be left alone, and besides, I like coming to see your aunt."

"How do you know my aunt?" Pansy demanded. Harry could see that she was becoming bolder, trying to take control of the situation.

"I told you. She's my uncle's girlfriend, and I live with him. She's been over e...well, a lot lately. Plus, she helped get my godfather out of jail."

"You mean that murderer, Sirius Black?" She bit back, venomously

Harry rolled his eyes "He was never a murderer. He was falsely accused."

"Then why did the Ministry lock him up?" Pansy argued forcefully. Harry could tell that she'd been listening to the conversations of others, probably her parents and grandparents at the very least, and had taken on some of their opinions. He decided to turn the tables.

"How did your aunt get him acquitted..."Harry paused, remembering he was talking to an 11-year-old "How did she convince them to release him, if he was guilty. Why did she even agree to represent him, if she believed he was guilty? Besides, doesn't she always say that her philosophy is that she'll 1) Never defend someone who's guilty, and 2) Never take on a case she doesn't believe she can win, and in order for her to win, the person has to be innocent. Not to mention, that it was your Great Aunt, Amelia Bones, that released him." Harry threw back at her

Pansy looked taken aback "How do you know..."

Harry sighed "I know your aunt. Why are you so hostile towards me, anyways?"

"I...what?" this obviously wasn't what she had expected

"Have I done anything to offend you?" he pressed

Now she did look confused “I...you...you hate us!” she blurted out

Harry’s expression softened “Us?...You mean Slytherins? Why would you think that? Have I ever given you that impression?”

“I...Wh...What are you playing at, Potter?” she huffed

Harry sighed “I’m not playing at anything. I just...find it annoying when people assume stuff about me that’s not true...especially without even taking to me.”

Pansy was still looking confused

Harry shook his head “I don’t hate someone, just because they’re in Slytherin. I don’t know why everyone assumes that I would.”

Pansy glared at him “You’re a bloody Gryffindor.” She sputtered

Harry shrugged “So what. Just because there’s a rivalry between our two houses, doesn’t mean I hate everyone in it.”

She wore a disbelieving look “Why?” she questioned suspiciously

Harry shrugged again, still wearing a calm expression “I don’t have any reason to. You haven’t done anything to me, nor have most of the other members of Slytherin House. I don’t hate someone unless they give me a valid reason.”

“Yeah...well...what about Draco Malfoy?” she asked, confusion in her voice

Harry chuckled “I don’t hate Draco. We just have...opposing view points...on several major issues, but I don’t hate him.”

Harry paused before speaking again.

“So...I’ve answered your questions. How about you answer one of mine...like ‘why you’re here’...besides the obvious answer of seeing your aunt. I heard something about a...get-together.”

Pansy seemed to be assessing him. This was obviously not the Harry Potter she had come to imagine or heard rumors of. There seemed to be an internal debate going on, and after a long moment, she finally responded.

“We...uh...have a family reunion every year on New Years Day. Grandma said that Aunt Karin wasn’t coming this year. She came here to...” her voice faltered

Harry nodded “I see...try and convince her to come...Well, I’m sorry about the way things went in there. I doubt that’s something your aunt wanted you to see.”

Pansy scowled again “You don’t know a thing about me, Potter.”

Harry chuckled again “Oh really. Okay. Name: Pansy Elana Parkinson. Only child of Eleanor and Caleb Parkinson. Age: 11-years-old. Birthday: February 6, 1980. Favorite Band: The Holly Head Harpies. Your favorite pastime is horseback riding, although you also enjoy swimming. You like shopping in London, Paris, Rome. You’re father’s extremely hard on you. You’re expected to marry Draco Malfoy, although you’re not formally engaged to him. You’re repulsed by the idea, and...your favorite colors blue.”

He paused, very much amused, watching her face contort, before speaking again.

“That...last one was just a guess by the way.”

Pansy was slightly pale now “How...how do you know...”

Harry laughed “Well...I would say I’m psychic, but...it’d be a lie. You aunt just likes to talk about you...a lot.”

Pansy was starting to look a bit angry

Harry shook his head “Don’t take offense in that. Take it as a compliment. It means she loves you, cares about you. She worries about you. You’re one of her favorite topics. That’s not a bad thing.”

Pansy looked like she was about to say something, but before she could get it out, the door to Karin's office flew open. An enraged Helena Parkinson suddenly came storming out the door like a bat out of hell. Both kids jumped a little, as the door slammed shut again.

"COME, Pansy!" she demanded, then without another sound, thundered down the hall

Pansy's face was pale, as she quickly stood up, and started to follow her grandmother.

"See ya at school." Harry called out

She briefly looked over her shoulder; a look of uncertainty, and a great deal of anxiety were the only emotions Harry could make out. She didn't respond, so Harry just gave her a smile, and a small wave, as she disappeared around the corner.

He then slumped back in his chair. Boy...this had been someday...and it was only half over, and he still had to deal with Sirius and Remus about his little scene with Augusta, although a plan was slowly formulating in his mind. At least he had some time to work out the kinks in one.

After a moment, he stood up, and tried the door. It was still locked. He figured the current charms on the door only allowed it to be open from the inside. He sighed. He could probably break them without too much effort, but he really wasn't in the mood, and he figured Remus would be out there in a minute, anyway. He decided to go get a drink from the machine around the corner.

Rewind-15 minutes

"GO!" Remus ordered sharply. He couldn't believe Harry had just said that. He truly was James' son.

As the door clicked shut, he turned his attention back to the situation at hand. He was about to say something, but Helena beat him to the punch.

"I CAN'T BELIEVE YOU! OF ALL THE DISGRACEFUL, SHAMEFUL, APPALLING..." she continued to loudly rant and rave over just about anything that came into her head. He and Karin just remained silent. After several minutes, she finally seemed to...well 'calm down' wasn't the right term, but she was running out of breath since she had pretty much said all that in one breath.

"Mother..." Karin started calmly

"Well, DO you have anything to say for yourself?!" she demanded, her hands on her hips

Karin matched her mother's stance, her hands also on her hips and an unwavering, determined glare on her face. "Yes, mother. As a matter-a-fact I do." She paused

"Well?" Helena demanded, tapping her foot

Karin smirked "Meet my boyfriend, Remus Lupin." She stated matter-a-factly

Helena's eyes narrowed "I gathered that much." She growled "And this is how you tell me? I..."

"I was going to tell you, Mother, but..."

"Mrs. Parkinson..." Remus interjected "If you would..."

"Mr. Lupin, I suggest you..."

"MOTHER..." Karin bellowed "I highly suggest you very carefully consider what you're about to say next!" A definite threat in her voice

"Karin, how dare you talk to me..."

“HELENA...” Remus interjected. Now he was angry “If you would SIT DOWN, and give your daughter and I a chance, we will EXPLAIN!” he ground out, fury in his voice

He put a protective arm around Karin, pulling her close, where, in which, she responded to the motion, fitting her body against his side.

“Well, I can see what’s going on here. I suppose this is where you’re plans lie?” she questioned heatedly

“As a matter-a-fact, mother, it is.” She stated sharply

“And I suppose my opinion means nothing!” she snapped

“I am a grown woman, mother. I don’t need your approval!” she huffed

Helena scowled “You’re making a huge mistake, Karin. Remember what happened last time!”

Karin’s face grew cold “I know what happened, Mother! The TRUTH! And even then, you didn’t stand up...”

“Don’t you DARE talk about what I DIDN’T do. You NEVER should have...”

“It was MY choice, and now I have to live with the consequences! But YOU...” Karin seethed for a moment, clenching and unclenching her fists. Remus put one hand on her shoulder, and took her right hand in his other, squeezing it in a comforting gesture.

She took a deep breath, before continuing “I want you OUT, Mother! This is my workplace, and not the time or place to do this.”

“KARIN PARKINSON, we are not finished here. You...”

“HELENA...” Remus growled again “For the time being, we are finished here. I suggest you leave. NOW!”

Karin was close to the brink of tears, and Remus looked ready to strangle someone, primarily the woman in front of him.

Helena let out an angry snarl "FINE!" she snapped "Just don't come crying to me when this all blows up in your face!"

With that, she turned, the door flying open, with a loud BANG, and then another bang as it closed again.

For a long moment, there was nothing but silence, then Karin lost what little control she had left. She turned around, throwing her arms around Remus' neck, burying her face in his shoulder, while the tears now fell freely. Karin's soft sobs echoed around the room, as Remus whispered gentle words of comfort, while stroking her hair.

It seemed like an eternity, before the tears finally slowed. Remus eased the two of them over to the couch, where she promptly curled up against him.

"I am...so sorry about this, Karin. I never should of..."

"No." she cut him off "This...wasn't your fault." She managed, tears still streaking her face

"I should have left, but..."

Karin shook her head "Thank you...for staying. I just...can't believe she would bring that up. She had no..."

"She was wrong to do that, and it was not your fault!" Remus insisted forcefully

"Wasn't it?" she choked out "If I hadn't...I knew what they were capable of, but I never believed...M...Maybe you should just..."

"Don't you even think like that!" He bit out forcefully

He took a deep breath, calming down a bit, before speaking again.

"I know the risks, Karin. I'm not going to be taken off guard or scared away. I love you, and that's enough reason for me to stick around." He bent down, and placed a gentle kiss on her lips.

She sighed heavily, relaxing into the kiss. After a moment, they broke apart, Karin leaning against his shoulder.

"What did I do to deserve you?" she asked, softly

Remus chuckled "I think that's my line." He replied "Why...why don't I get you out of here. We can go...anywhere you want."

Karin sighed again "I...wish I could. It's just I've got this meeting this afternoon that I...just can't afford to miss."

Remus nodded, placing a kiss on her forehead "That's fine. Are you still coming over tonight?"

This made her smile "I can't wait. Is Harry still cooking?"

Remus laughed "He's insisting on it. He actually seems to enjoy it, so I don't fight him on it."

"Then I will definitely be over."

"Are you saying you wouldn't be over if I was cooking?" he question, amusement in his voice

"Well...maybe, but if you were cooking, I'd insist on you taking us out to eat, cause otherwise St. Mungos would be in for a busy..."

"Hey!" he shot back "It's not that bad. Just because I burnt that..."

But he never finished his sentence. Mischief now danced in Karin's eyes, as she leaned over, silencing him with a kiss.

"I'm just kidding." She smirked "I'd eat your cooking any time...especially if it's...dessert" she added wickedly

Remus blushed a little, but returned the smirk "I think that can be arranged...but I guess it'll have to wait till tonight. I do need to get to work. Are you sure you're going to be okay?" true concern in his voice

Karin nodded "I'll be fine. Was there anything you needed?"

"Well...nothing that can't wait 'till tonight. If you're sure..."

"I'll be fine." She assured again "Besides, I'm sure Harry's anxiously waiting to bombard you with questions about the...fireworks." She stated clearly amused

Remus chuckled "You're probably right. Well, if you need anything, or if anything should..."

"I won't hesitate to call. Now go."

He gave her one final kiss, before disappearing out the door.

He found his nephew in the hallway, reading a magazine.

"Ready to go?" Remus asked

Harry looked up "You're still in one piece." He stated humor in his voice "I guess we won't be making another trip to St. Mungos after all."

Remus scowled "Cheeky Brat." He huffed, although his voice also held a note of jesting

Harry's voice now changed to a more serious tone "So...how's Ms. Karin doing?" he questioned softly

Remus was surprised by the level of compassion he was hearing in his nephew, but answered "She's doing okay. She's still coming over tonight. We'll tell her about the Longbottoms then. For now, just keep it quiet. Oh, and don't think you're off the hook. You've got a lot of explaining to do."

Harry grimaced slightly He had better come up with a plan and FAST!

I am SOOO Sorry this chapter took me so long. I've had major writers block, and school has been really intense. I will get the next chapter up quicker, but give me about 3 weeks, although I'm aiming to have it up before Thanksgiving. Please be patient. I promise, this story won't be abandoned.

Please tell me what you think of this chapter. It's my longest yet. Over 15,000 words. Thanks in advance.

Midnight Star 25

Explanations and Details

The day passed all too quickly for Harry. Sirius didn't show up 'till almost closing time, and completely perturbed at having to deal with Gringotts for so long. They didn't leave the office 'till almost 6. By the time they flooed back to the apartment, they found that Karin had beaten them there, and had already begun cooking.

"I thought I'd help Harry out a bit." She said simply

Harry gave her a smile, before washing his hands, and joining her next to the stove. Between the two of them, they prepared a meal of homemade lasagna, salad, garlic bread, and an icebox chocolate pie for dessert.

After dinner, Harry tried sneaking away to his room, but only managed to get a few feet down the hall, before his uncle forcefully called him to come back into the living room. It wasn't a request.

Harry grimaced, wishing this part was over, and praying his plan would work. He quickly went over the story he was going with. He applied his occulmentry exercises, and reminded himself that this was not the worst thing that could happen.

His uncle called him again. Harry sighed, and made his way back to the living room. Knowing he wasn't going to get out of this, he plopped down in an armchair, curling his feet up underneath him.

"You requested my presence." He half stated, a slight smugness in his tone

Remus shot him a look "Harry James Potter, I suggest you not..."

Harry raised his hands in surrender, his expression softening "I'm sorry Uncle Moony. I...didn't mean to be rude."

Remus gave him a calculating look, then sighed "Alright Harry. How about we skip the formalities, and go straight to an explanation."

Karin, who was sitting next to Remus on the couch, looked up curiously "Explanation for what?" she questioned

"I thought they said you could tell her, Moony?" Sirius piped up

Remus nodded "They did. Something...came up this afternoon."

"Tell me what?" Karin questioned

Remus put an arm around her "I think you need to hear what Harry did first. Harry, would you like to tell Karin what you did today?"

Harry internally sighed. Of course he would bring Karin into this. He couldn't be sure of all of his uncle's reasons, but one big one came to mind. Karin was a lawyer, and therefore trained to watch and see if people are lying or find holes in their stories. Harry supposed it was lucky that he was trained in the art of deception. He wasn't entirely sure it was a good thing, but during war time, it was necessary if you wanted to stay alive, and over the years, it had become more than second nature to him.

"Uh, not really." He answered honestly

"Harry..." Remus stated, warningly

Harry sighed "Alright, alright, I performed a...misericordiaindulgeo." He said quickly, running the last two words together

Karin looked confused "A...what?"

"A Misericordia Indulgeo." Remus clarified

Karin's eyes widened "Was it accepted?" she asked bluntly

Remus gave her a curious look "That's your first question?"

Karin shrugged "Sorry. You just don't hear about that being done much anymore, much less by a kid."

Harry rolled his eyes. He hated being called a kid. It annoyed him more than he thought it would.

“Yes, I know. That’s one reason it was such a shocker. Also considering he’s not a pureblood, nor was he raised as one. Harry, you want to explain that to us?”

Harry grimaced “It’s...not a big deal.” He said slowly

“Not a big deal? Tell Karin who you did this to.”

Harry deliberately bit his lip. He was doing his best to play the guilty feeling kid.

“A...Augusta Longbottom.” He stated, barely above a whisper, although it was obviously loud enough that Karin had heard him

Now, she was wearing a stunned expression “The Augusta Longbottom?!”

Sirius nodded “That was our response.”

“You requested a Mercy Pardon from Augusta Longbottom?” directing her question towards Harry, if trying to wrap her mind around the idea

Harry sighed, but slowly nodded

Karin still wore a surprised look, but relaxed into the couch

“Well, I’m impressed.” She stated simply

“You...are?”

Karin nodded simply

“Karin, he does not need any encouragement on this.” Remus huffed

Karin looked amused “Oh, come on. Let’s be honest. None of us would have had the guts to even attempt that, especially at his age.”

"None of us would have been that suicidal." Threw in Sirius

"So it wasn't accepted?" Karin asked

"No it was." Remus answered

"Okay, that's good; and why was it done?"

"Well...that gets into the other piece of news I mentioned. What do you know about the Longbottom situation?"

Karin shrugged "As much as anyone who was old enough to remember that time. We knew, uh, know them socially as purebloods. I was going through the training to become a lawyer at the time of that trial. It was a major part of our post-war trial study. Why?"

At this point, Harry spoke up "Neville's a friend of mine, and his mother is my godmother."

Karin seemed to think for a moment "Of course. I remember reading that in your parents will. They were supposed to get custody if Sirius was unable to. Remus was the next in line."

Harry nodded "My mum and Alice Longbottom were best friends."

"Okay, so what does that have to do with what you did?"

Harry didn't say anything, but looked over at his uncle, almost asking what he was allowed to say. Remus took over at this point.

Karin, um, Glenn hasn't said anything about...something big coming out of the Foundation, has he?"

Karin looked confused "No. Why?"

Remus sighed "Because we went to visit the Longbottoms at St. Mungos today. This is why." He pulled one of Neville's letters off the coffee table, and handed it to her

There was nothing but silence as Karin read over the letter. After a long moment, she slowly put it down.

"Is this real?" she asked softly

Remus nodded "Sirius and I didn't believe it either, but" Remus sighed "We saw them today, and...you can barely tell that anything happened to them."

"Well, wow. This is remarkable, but...why do I get the feeling you're not telling me this simply for my information?"

"It's who's responsible for this potion." Remus started "It's..." he hesitated "It's the Unity Foundation; Jacob, to be more precise."

"As in Myers?" Karin questioned in surprise

"That's what Frank and Alice told us. They also said that Glenn was the one handling the contracts and legal paperwork for all this. I just thought he might have said something to you."

Karin shook her head, a perplexed look on her face "I haven't heard anything about it."

"Well you will." Sirius spoke up "It's being released to the press tomorrow."

"And you haven't heard anything from work?" Karin asked

Remus shook his head "Not a word. Richard apparently knew about this as well. I suppose there'll be some kind of announcement of explanation when we go back to work on Thursday. I wondered why we got New Years off. Most places aren't closed."

"You think this is the reason?" Karin asked curiously

Remus shrugged "Who knows. I guess we'll find out. Do you think Glenn will say anything?"

“He’ll have to won’t he; especially if he’s dealing with the legal side of this. I mean this is...huge! I can’t imagine the legal ramifications connected to it becoming public knowledge. It’s...” Karin let out a breath “It’s something between a lawyer’s dream and a lawyer’s nightmare. I admit, I’m a bit jealous Jacob didn’t ask me to handle this. This is the kind of thing that can help to make or break your career.” She paused “Kind of like representing a 10 year imprisoned convicted murder, and proving he’s innocent.”

Sirius pulled off something between a frown and a glare “Glad my personal tragedy helped boost your career.” He stated, sarcasm dripping from his tone

Karin chuckled “Sorry Sirius. Just being honest. Your case has certainly helped to boost my credibility, as well as that of the firms.”

Harry felt only the tiniest ping of guilt hearing Karin verbalize her disappointment that he’d chose Glen over her. He’d done that for several reasons, none of which had to do with his confidence in her abilities. The main reason was the fact that she had been dealing with Sirius’ case at the time. The other one being her closeness to Remus. This had to be kept absolutely quiet, which it had, and he hadn’t wanted her to have to keep this from him.

Karin was still talking.

“But that still doesn’t explain why Harry did it, or even what he needed a pardon for.”

Harry decided to answer before his guardians did, or forced him to.

“I kinda shot my mouth off, and halfway threatened her...just a bit.” He said very quickly

Now Karin did look shocked, and it was a moment before she spoke again.

“How in the world did you threaten Augusta Longbottom?!”

“Yeah, we still haven’t figured that one out, and we were there.”
Added Sirius

Harry sighed “It wasn’t exactly a ‘threat’ or a secret, just...something Neville’s parents didn’t know, and they wouldn’t have been happy about.”

Now all three adults looked at him curiously

“What do you mean by that, Harry?” Remus questioned

“Just something Neville told us at School. Something that his great uncle...did to him.” He ended slowly

Now Karin turned back into the hardened lawyer “Harry, if his uncle did something to him, you really need to...”

Harry fiercely shook his head “No! No, that’s not what I meant. Not like the Dursleys. He wasn’t trying to harm him...at least not intentionally...”

“Harry, you’re not making any sense.” Stated a confused Remus

Harry sighed again “Okay. You see, when Neville was a kid, he, uh, didn’t show...well, signs of magic. Actually, he really didn’t start to show signs until fairly recently.”

Karin now wore a look of understanding.

“I see.” She said softly “Well, it’s certainly not unheard of.”

“What’s not unheard of?” Sirius questioned, still oblivious

“Think about it, Sirius.” Karin continued “Think back to when we were kids. What were some of the stories we heard about other pureblood kids that didn’t show signs of magic right away, if they ever did?”

Sirius paused, before a look of disgust slowly crossed his face “Oh, Merlin. Umh.”

There was a moment of silence, before Remus spoke up, a look of revulsion on his own face.

“Okay Harry, tell us exactly what Neville told you. No matter how bad it is, Frank and Alice need to know.”

Harry looked up “They...may already. I told Neville that...he really needed to be the one to tell them.”

Remus appeared surprised “That’s very wise, Harry. Is that what you really wanted to say in there?” Remus asked, as if slowly putting the pieces of this particular puzzle together

Harry bit his lip, but nodded “He shouldn’t have gone through it, but...”

A frown crossed his own face before continuing “When Neville was 6, his uncle pushed him into the pond next to their house. Neville didn’t know how to swim. He nearly drowned. Then at the age of 8, his uncle held him by his ankle out the second story window, then ‘accidently’ dropped him when his wife called him.” Harry’s voice was bitter, but he continued “That was his first sign of magic. He, uh, bounced all the way down, but if he hadn’t...” Harry shook his head “I got the feeling that there may have been other incidents, but those were the only ones Neville told us about.” He paused then added “I went too far. It wasn’t my place to use that information. I’m really sorry.”

Nothing was said for a moment, then Remus spoke

“You’re right Harry, it wasn’t your place, and...as admirable as it was, it wasn’t your duty to defend Sirius.”

“That’s right Harry.” Sirius interjected “As much as I appreciate it, you don’t need to do that. People are going to believe what they want to, and Augusta Longbottom does have some right...”

“NO, she doesn’t!” Harry interrupted, forcefully

“Harry!” Remus reprimanded sharply

"But she doesn't!" Harry insisted "She had no right to blame Sirius for something his cousin did. He had no control over it. It's like the Dursleys blaming me, for simply being magical, the wizarding world blaming you for being bitten as a kid, or Snape holding a grudge against me, just because I look like my dad!"

He clapped a hand over his mouth, realizing what he'd just said, and inwardly groaned as he looked at Sirius' face. Boy, he was really shooting his mouth off today.

"What do you mean Snape?!" Sirius ground out

Remus let out a breath "He teaches Potions at Hogwarts, Sirius, and he doesn't particularly like Harry, but he hasn't done anything, at least as far as I know." He added quickly, shooting a glance at his nephew

Harry shook his head "He hasn't. He just...doesn't like me."

"He's a teacher?! How..."

"Sirius please." Remus groaned "Can we talk about this later. We have other things to deal with right now."

Sirius looked far from happy, but clammed up, his arms folded across his chest, and a scowl dominating his face

Karin, who had simply been listening and talking this all in, now spoke up

"Okay, I think I'm beginning to get the picture. Bellatrix Lestrange used to be Bellatrix Black, Sirius' cousin. Augusta didn't like the fact that Sirius was there or didn't believe he was innocent, maybe something of both. She went off on him, or made some comment about him, and that's where Harry stepped in, which incidentally led up to a mercy pardon." She paused before asking "Am I anywhere in the ballpark?"

Remus ran his fingers through her hair "Its times like this I remember just why you're a lawyer and a Slytherin. You're very close, but not

quite, but this is why we're making such a big deal out of this, and why it's so confusing. You see, she didn't say anything. In fact, she didn't say two words to anyone from the moment we set foot in the ward the Longbottoms were in. One minute we were all talking. The next, Harry was going off about how she was upset that Sirius was there."

"But...if she didn't say anything, how did Harry..."

"That's what we're here to find out. Harry, would you like to explain just how you knew exactly what Augusta was thinking, without her verbalizing anything?" Remus' tone was one that left no room for dispute, and said that he expected an honest answer

Harry let out a heavy sigh. This is where his plan kicked in. At this moment, he could tell his uncle's trust in him was on shaky ground, even if Remus didn't know exactly why it was. That trust was one thing he had no desire to lose, and something he highly valued. He couldn't lose it. He just couldn't. And his relationship with Sirius was still in its infant stage. He couldn't bare the thought of destroying the progress he had made. He let out another sigh, then began.

"I didn't know what she was thinking. I just guessed."

He was now receiving some incredulous looks

Remus' tone was extremely firm "Harry, you can't expect us to believe you simply guessed at all that, and got it exactly right. You don't just..."

"No." Harry interrupted "You're right. I didn't just guess everything. You see, I...well, you're gonna think I'm weird or...crazy." He said, a slight waver in his voice

The faces seemed to soften a bit, but they still held looks of confusion

"Harry, no one here is going to think you're crazy." Remus said gently "We just need you to tell us the truth."

Harry fidgeted a bit, but looked at his uncle "...knew what she was feeling. I could sense it."

The adults looked at each other, curiosity and surprise on their faces

"What do you mean by that? What do you mean by 'sense'?" Karin questioned

Harry bit his lip "I don't know. I just can."

"You know what people are feeling?" Karin continued

"Like an Empath?" Sirius interjected

Harry shook his head "I don't think so. The Muggle world believes in Empaths also. I don't think this is the same thing. It...it only happens with really strong emotions."

"Strong emotions?"

Harry nodded

Remus looked at him questionably "Why don't you explain exactly what happens. I promise, no ones going to think you're crazy. I take it this has happened before?"

He nodded again

"When was the first time?" It was Karin who posed the question this time

"I...I really don't remember." He answered slowly, hesitation in his voice "I used to feel it when...when Uncle Vernon would get really angry with me. Then, when I came to the wizarding world, I realized that the same thing happened, except it was...different."

"How was it different?" Sirius asked

“Well. I not only felt their emotions, but also their...their magic.” He stumbled out, a slight fear filling his words

For a moment, the ticking of the wall clock was the only sound penetrating the room. It was Remus who finally spoke

“Alright, Harry. Can you describe this for us; this...sensation?” He asked slowly

Harry bit his lip “I’m not exactly sure how. I guess it’s like a...tingling sensation or vibration.”

He sighed at the confused looks he was receiving “I’ve read about Empaths, and everything seems to point that they sense others’ emotions internally. That’s not me. Everything I feel seems to come externally. I have to be close or near someone to feel anything, and even then, they have to be exhibiting a strong emotion; anger, fear, sadness, hate. Something like that. With muggles, I just feel their emotions. Here in the magical world, I also feel their magic. It’s like it...radiates off them, I guess. I don’t know why or how I feel this, I...I just do.” He ended nervously

His audience seemed to be processing this information, then Remus spoke

“And this is how you knew what Augusta was feeling?”

Harry nodded “I didn’t notice until I was closer to her, but then I felt it. She was...really angry. Her magic was everywhere.”

“What do you mean by ‘everywhere’?” Sirius asked

“Umm, just unfocused. It was ‘boiling’, you know, overflowing. Teachers and books always talk about ‘focusing your magic’, controlling it. She wasn’t doing either. It was sporadic, and her anger seemed to be...mixed into it. Do...does that make any sense?”

“I...think so, Harry.” Remus answered slowly “But if you just knew she was angry, how did you know she was angry at Sirius?”

Harry looked directly into his uncle's eyes "The way she was looking at him. It was the same way Uncle Vernon used to look at me; like I was a threat to his perfect family, an infection or disease to his normal way of life. I told you I knew that Sirius was Bellatrix's cousin. I just kind of put two and two together." Harry knew the sympathy card was something of a low blow, but he was telling the truth in this instant, at least for the most part. Sympathy, especially for real events, was a powerful tool.

Harry could tell that his words had had an effect from the looks he was receiving

Remus spoke again, pity in his voice "I'm truly sorry, Harry. That does help explain some things, but there is one more thing. How did you know 'Misericordia Indulgeo'? It's a very obscure ritual, and seldom used."

Harry reached down, and grabbed hold of his book bag. He lifted the flap, and pulled out several books, handing one of them over to Remus. A curious expression crossed Remus' face, as he examined the book.

"What are you doing with this book, Harry?" he questioned

Harry sighed, and handed the other two books he had pulled out

Remus now wore a puzzled expression as he passed the books to Sirius and Karin

"You're reading about purebloods?" Sirius inquired, inspecting the book

Harry nodded

"Any particular reason?" Karin asked gently

Harry shrugged "I don't know." He answered, noncommittally

"Harry, there has to be a reason." Remus pressed

“I...okay. When, um, when I found out dad was one, I was curious. Then I found out about...well, pureblood beliefs, I guess. I wanted to know what they believed and why, so I just started reading about them. It's one of the ways I learn. I read stuff, and I remember what I read. That particular ritual is, um, in that first book I gave you, I believe. There are a couple of others in my room.”

Sirius flipped through the book, until he found what he was looking for “He's right, Moony. It's here.” He stated, handing the book back over to Remus

Remus briefly examined the article, before closing the book, and setting it down on the table. He now wore a look that distinctly said he wasn't quite sure what to do next. He had very little experience when it came to dealing with children, and this certainly wasn't what he expected to be dealing with. Honestly, he wouldn't have expected to be dealing with this with a pureblood kid, much less one raised by Muggles, if you could call what the Dursley's did ‘raising’.

That sent a renewed surge of anger and guilt, remembering everything Harry has suffered the last ten years of his life. He went over the day. Everything that has been said; everything that had been done. Remus went back over exactly what Harry had said to Augusta. He'd actually started off by apologizing, then taken responsibility for being the one to have requested the meeting, He'd never minimized her feelings, merely named off to whom they should be directed; and even when he'd ‘threatened’ her, he'd only been defending his friend who'd suffered physical mistreatment; ohh, call it what it was; abuse, at the hands of his own family.

If he had to be honest with himself, he was actually incredibly proud of Harry at this moment. By performing the Mercy Pardon, he'd shown bravery, not knowing the outcome, although if he'd known about it before hand, would have forbidden it, and deemed it extremely foolhardy. He'd shown true loyalty, not only towards Sirius, but Neville as well. He'd never, actually, been disrespectful towards Augusta, or anyone else he could think of, for that matter. There was no doubt that Harry was impulsive, and a bit of a hothead, but then again, would he really expect anything less out of James' son and Sirius' godson?

He bit back a smile at the thought. Harry was proving he was a true Marauder more and more everyday. There was still a great deal of mystery surrounding his nephew, but perhaps, this conversation had revealed a big piece of the puzzle. If Harry was as sensitive to magic as he claimed to be, and he didn't seem to be lying, possibly it explained what else he'd seen. He felt more certain than ever that it had something to do with that night and that scar, although he couldn't put his finger onto exactly 'what'.

Brought out of his thoughts, he realized the other three occupants were staring at him, waiting to see what he would next.

He rubbed his eyes, then turned his attention back to his nephew. His words came slowly

"Alright, Harry. Let me first say that...despite everything...I am very proud of you. You not only stood up for Sirius, but Neville as well. You believed something was unjust, and you tried to right it."

Harry just looked at his uncle. He silently breathed a tiny sigh of relief. Okay, this was a good start, although he felt a 'but' coming on.

"Your methods however..."

Yep, there it was.

Remus sighed "Harry, your methods, while...socially acceptable, well, accepted within pureblood society, are not always the best course of action, and should not be taken lightly. Do you know what the consequences would have been, had the pardon not been accepted?" Remus' voice was back to a serious note

Harry bit his lip, and slowly nodded

Remus' lips twitched in uncertainty "Harry, I don't expect you to understand the ramifications of that, or any of these rituals. No matter how much you've read, most of these require, well, a deeper understanding, usually through personal experience, and a...negative response." He added hesitantly

Harry didn't say anything, just nodded in response. Harry knew this all too well, and he'd performed many of them throughout his lifetime. He did understand the ramifications of receiving a negative response. Of course he couldn't voice this, so he just kept his mouth shut.

"I can't...order you not to use it again, and at times, they do, um, have their place, but I want you to be very, very careful. The one you used today was mild, compared to some of the others. If you ever feel like you need to use one again, please come talk to one of us about it, before you attempt it."

"That's right, Harry." Karin interjected "We're all purebloods here, and have had this stuff drilled into our heads from the time we could walk. We can also try to answer any questions you may have. There's a lot of information in those books that you need to take with a grain of salt and a lot of facts you won't find in a book."

Harry hid a grin, remembering that he'd said something similar to Hermione on the train to Hogwarts. She was right. There was a great deal you couldn't learn from books, like how it felt if a ritual was performed incorrectly, the actual ramifications of a life debt, or some other consequence, or ways someone could manipulate or alter a ritual to make it dangerous or deadly, not that some of them weren't that way already in their original form.

Harry gave her a small smile "Thank you." he said simply "I'll remember that."

Karin chuckled "Do you mean that, or are you just saying that to get out of here?"

Harry pretended to look insulted "I'm hurt." he said, feigning an innocent tone "An 11-year-old would always prefer a conversation about obscure rituals over setting up pranks in his guardian's rooms."

That caused the whole room to laugh, and broke some of the tension, but Remus still seemed to have something on his mind, and his next comment proved this theory correct.

Once the laughter died down, Remus started “Uh, Harry...I need to know something.”

Harry gave him a curious look “Okay.”

Remus hesitated, then flat out asked “How easily does magic come to you?”

Harry’s mask faltered. That was not what he had expected to hear. How could Remus have known that?! He’d tried to be so careful this holiday. He wasn’t supposed to use magic outside of school. He kept reminding himself of that. He’d caught himself, more than once, but it was a really difficult habit to break, especially having used it for 20 years prior, most of that being non restrictive.

“Wh...what do you mean?” he asked slowly

“Yeah, what do you mean, Moony?” Sirius asked, thoroughly confused. Karin also wore a look of puzzlement

Remus held up a hand to his best friend “It’s a fairly simple question, Harry.” He stated matter-a-factly

“I...don’t understand.” Harry tried again

Remus sighed. Harry wasn’t going to make this easy on him, was he. He decided to try the direct approach.

“I saw you that night, Harry. Do you want to explain that?”

Night? Okay--that could be bad. What night? He always had spells and charms in place during the few times he had had to deal with Angel business this holiday, and he’d been fortunate enough not to have to leave to deal with Foundation business since school let out, aside from that quick visit to Maria Roberts.

“Did I...do something wrong?” he asked in a small voice. Technically the answer to that question was ‘YES!’, but surely if Remus had seen something, he would have brought it up sooner than this, wouldn’t he?

Remus sighed, rubbing his forehead "No, Harry. You didn't do anything wrong."

Okay, that was good.

"You just surprised me."

Harry bit his lip, thoroughly confused "I really don't know what you mean, Uncle Moony." he admitted honestly

Remus shook his head, then looked directly at his nephew "I saw you that night, Harry; Christmas Day, at Unity House; with those two boys. One of their names was Rick, I believe."

Harry managed to keep a neutral expression, although all he wanted to do was kick himself, preferably in the head. Maybe it would jumpstart some of his commonsense, since he seemed to be severely lacking in that at the present time. Actually, he wasn't sure he ever had it to loose in the first place, but he was willing to try anything at the moment.

He quickly went over everything he remembered about that night. They'd talked to Emily. Reyna had dragged him away, the ward had fallen...Harry grimaced. That had been his mistake. The ward had fallen when Alex and Rick had shown up. He'd been an idiot and hadn't replaced it. Of course he hadn't expected to go into lecture mode, but still...his paranoia usually made him more cautious then that.

Okay, so...how could he get out of this, or at least minimize the damage. His mind quickly went through several scenarios. He finally decided to use facts to start with, then go from there.

"They...they said it was okay to use magic there." He said in a soft voice, his head slightly lowered

"Well, they were right Harry. I'm not upset that you performed magic. It's just the...level of it that's...curious." He finally decided

Harry hid his amusement. He could tell Remus was trying not to use a word like 'confusing', 'questionable', or 'impossible'. He quickly sobered though, remembering he had to rectify this situation. Instead of flat out admitting to it, he decided to try and push Remus to say what he really wanted to.

"In...what way?" he asked slowly

"Yeah, what do you mean Moony?" Sirius asked again

Remus let out a low noise then held a note of frustration. Karin placed a soothing hand on his arm, using her fingertips, gently massaging in a circular motion. Remus seemed to relax slightly, but still appeared perturbed.

"Harry." he started slowly "Your level of spell-work that night was far beyond 1st year, and between the way you talked, and the fact that you've been at Hogwarts for four months, I have every reason to believe that you know that."

Ohhh boy. He'd really stepped into it now. How was he supposed to get out of this one? That transfiguration spell had probably been 5th or 6th year material, and the fact that it had been silent probably made it NEWT level. Quick, Think Quick! What could he do? Well, the...'partial' truth had gotten him out of the first predicament. Maybe...

"I...I do know." he admitted slowly, lowering his eyes

All three adults were now looking at him curiously

"How advanced are we talkin' here Moony?" Sirius asked

Remus sighed "Probably...advanced OWL level, minimum."

Now both Karin's and Sirius' eyes widened as they turned to stare at Harry

"Are you serious, Moony!? He's only a first year."

“I realize that, but...”

“Hey, Hey.” Karin interjected calmly “Now, it’s obvious that Remus saw something, and Harry’s admitting to it. Why don’t we start with exactly what that was, and go from there. Harry, can you show us what you did that night?”

Now this made Harry look up in curiosity “But...I’m not supposed to do magic outside of...a school.” he answered slowly, deciding to cover all of his bases at once

Karin chuckled “Well, while that’s officially the way the law reads under the Restriction for Underage Wizardry, there’s about a dozen other laws that do permit it when certain requirements are met, usually only met within pureblood households.”

“Karin, don’t tell him that.” Remus huffed “I don’t want him getting any ideas.”

Harry bit back a very amused look

“Oh, come on Remus. We’re all purebloods here, and we all exploited these facts at one time or another. He’s bound to find out anyways. He might as well get the right information.”

Remus grumbled something under his breath, but reluctantly nodded “Alright.” he groaned “But, Harry, this does not mean that you can use magic whenever you feel like it.”

“Chill out, Remus.” Sirius chuckled “Think about how often we got away with it. We practically got away with magic whenever we felt like it.”

“Sirius, you are not helping things.”

“Remus, honey.” Karin sighed “Look Harry.” she started again, turning her attention back to him “The Ministry has some very strict laws about the use of underage magic. That’s why they tell you not to use it while you’re away from school. They believe it creates a safety hazard since these witches and wizards are ‘untrained’, and

jeopardizes the 'International Statute of Secrecy' with the Muggle world, especially when it comes to muggleborns. A great many purebloods didn't like these laws when they first came into effect, therefore, they opted to add their own bylaws, making them and their children exceptions to these rules."

"What do you mean?" Harry asked, deliberately wearing a perplexed expression

"The Ministry can only detect magic, Harry." Karin continued "They can't detect who did it, especially when it comes to all magical households, or places like Hogwarts. Purebloods knew this, so they wrote their bylaws, using the argument that underage magic performed within a magical household would do nothing to endanger the 'Statute of Secrecy', and as long as it was properly monitored, would cause no harm to anyone else. Under the law, a child is allowed to perform underage magic, either under the instruction of a private tutor, which would be just like the child was in school; or under the direct supervision of a parental unit, the argument there being that parents are often the best teachers for their children...which I don't entirely disagree with, although I can think of several exceptions."

Harry could too. Lucius Malfoy, for starters, followed by Caleb Parkinson, Braxton Parkinson (Karin's father), Crabbe, Goyle, Zabini, Flint, and a whole fleet of others.

He already knew everything that Karin was saying, and as he thought about it, he realized that he had just been handed a gift. A BIG one.

"Soo...as long as I'm in your presence and have your permission, I can...perform magic outside of school, and since we live in a magical part of London, and there's so much magic around us, the Ministry can't detect where it came from?"

Remus groaned "Oh, Karin...you've corrupted him." Remus sighed "Yes, Harry. That's about the gist of it, but as I said before, you may not use magic anytime you feel like it. You just started Hogwarts, and you're still learning."

“Lighten up, Moony. And besides, if what you say is true, he’s already got some natural ability. Come on, Harry. Show us what Remus is talking about.” Sirius encouraged, a hint of excitement in his voice.

Harry bit back a smile, trying not to think of the irony of the situation

“So I...have permission?” he asked, a slight hesitation in his tone

Remus sighed “Yes, Harry, you do.”

“And...I won’t get in trouble?”

Remus shook his head “But you have to do exactly what you did that night. Do you remember?”

Harry nodded, in response.

Oh boy, did he ever. Remus wasn’t going to make this easy on him. He wondered if repeating exactly what he did that night included performing a dark spell to manipulate the Dark Mark. He wondered where he could get his hands on a Death Eater to demonstrate that particular little ‘sweetheart’. He thought that Karin’s brother or father might be available, or he could just pop on over, and pick up Wormtail. Remus and Sirius would just ‘love’ to see him...oh, wait. He had performed that spell around 3 a.m. that next morning. Darn, they were off the hook for that.

“Okay.” Harry shrugged “But...it’s really not a big deal.” he said, trying to downplay this

“Why don’t you just show us.” Karin said gently

“Exactly, Harry.” Remus emphasized

Harry sighed. Remus wasn’t going to let this go. Remus had seen him. He had to do it exactly as he’d done it that night. Well, maybe this wouldn’t be a bad thing. Maybe it would. Guess he was about to find out.

With one swift motion, Harry stood up, pulled out his wand, aimed it at a lamp, and without a single word, transfigured it into an identical copy of the puppy. Since the lamp had been the one next to Sirius, the puppy immediately jumped down into his lap, and started pawing at his shirt, all the while 'yipping' happily.

Remus had seen this before, and only showed the smallest hint of surprise that Harry pulled it off so flawlessly on the first try. Karin and Sirius, on the other hand, had their eyes shooting 'back and forth', from Harry to the puppy. Neither one seemed to be able to find their tongue, but Remus didn't seem to have that problem.

"Reverse it." Remus stated simply

It took Harry a minute to process what Remus had said. He frowned. Well, he'd gone this far.

With another flick of his wrist, and without a sound, he levitated the puppy back onto the table, and a second later it was a lamp again. He plopped back onto the chair, trying to play it cool.

"See, no big deal." he stated in a bored voice

That, at least, seemed to loosen Sirius' tongue.

"NO BIG DEAL?! Are you kidding Harry?!"

"Do you realize what you just did?" Karin added

"Umm, transfiguration." he stated in a practical voice, although he kept a hint of sarcasm out that he desperately wanted to throw in

"Harry..." Remus stated, warningly

"But that's all I did." he stated in a slightly panicked voice "It was just transfiguration."

"It was inanimate to an animate object transfiguration, and even ignoring the fact that you did it silently..." Karin seemed at a loss

“Well, that’s what Professor McGonagall did on the first day of class.”
Harry replied innocently

Now the adults looked at him curiously

“What does Minerva have to do with this?” Karin asked

Harry shrugged “The first day of class, she turned her desk into a pig.
I thought it was cool.”

“Are you saying you tried it, and simply ‘did it’?” Sirius asked

Harry shook his head “No, I looked it up, but it wasn’t that hard.”

Remus shook his head “Back to my original question, Harry. How easily does magic come to you?”

Harry sighed “A lot easier then it does with my friends, but they don’t completely know it.” He figured this was a ‘fairly’ safe answer

“Do your teachers?” Remus asked bluntly

Harry shook his head.

“Why not?” Sirius asked, still trying to process all of this

Harry groaned “Because of this stupid thing.” he huffed, swiping his hand across his scar “Everyone treats me different already, simply because I’m famous for my parents getting murdered. I hate it! I just want to be normal.” He took a deep breath before continuing “My friends and teachers know that I pick up on the material rather quickly, but that’s as far as it goes. They don’t know how easily the spells come to me...and I don’t want them to.” He added somewhat firmly, although not harshly

Remus rubbed his forehead “Harry, I’m still a bit...blown away by this, but if you’re not being challenged...”

Harry sighed “Uncle Moony, I can always find something in the library to challenge me, and there’s still a lot I’m learning that’s difficult

enough, such as the theory and history, not to mention astronomy, herbology, care of magical creatures, and history of magic. None of those can be done with a wand.” He deliberately left out potions for several obvious reasons. Partly because he was bloody fantastic at it, and partly because of Sirius’ outburst earlier. Unfortunately, that didn’t stop Sirius from saying something

“And what about Potions...” he started in a demanding tone

“Sirius.” Remus groaned “Please, not right now. We know how much you dislike Snape...”

“He’s a bloody Death Eater!” Sirius barked

“Sirius!” Remus snapped “That’s enough! You did not need to say that in front of Harry.”

Harry sighed “It’s okay. I already knew that.”

Remus was still glaring at his friend “Never-the-less that was still uncalled for. Despite the past, Severus Snape is your teacher, and Sirius would do well to consider that before shooting off his mouth.”

Sirius glared back “You will never convince me that Snivellus isn’t the same...”

“Sirius ENOUGH!” Remus growled. He buried his face in his hands, rubbing it angrily

It took him a moment to calm down, but finally spoke “Look, I don’t particularly like the guy either, but he is Harry’s teacher, and we will have to deal with him, if only in that capacity, and as far as that goes, now is not the time to deal with this.”

Sirius wore an irritated scowl, as he slumped back into the couch “Fine!” he huffed “But we will deal with it.”

“Fine.” Remus agreed, if only to get him to drop the subject

Karin, who finally found an opening, succeeded in changing the subject “Well, now that we’ve chassed that rabbit, I’m still curious about Harry.”

‘Of course they would go back to him.’ Harry thought, as he internally groaned

“What would you like to know?” he figured it would be better to take the offensive rather than the defensive

It was a moment before Sirius, who was still ‘seething’ by the way, asked “What all can you do?”

Well, that was an open ended question. Harry shrugged stiffly “I don’t know. A lot.”

“Define ‘a lot’.” Remus added

Harry put on a perplexed look, and just shrugged again.

“Well, how about the most...advanced spell you know.” Karin threw in, after a moment of silence

This made Harry raise an eyebrow. Harry seriously doubted that she truly wanted the answer to that one. He had never taken the time to ‘rank’ all of spells he knew, especially after the final battle, and with the knowledge he had inherited from Tom. He knew some extremely ‘advanced’, not to mention dark, dangerous, and deadly spells, curses, and rituals.

But if they wanted to see something ‘advanced’, perhaps he could do that. Advanced, advanced. What could he do? Which one could he...Then it hit him! It was perfect, but how could he explain it? His mind was working over time. Okay...no that wouldn’t work. That...no. Maybe he could ‘Yes’ that was it.

The adults were currently staring at him, waiting for him to say something. He lifted his head.

“I can do a Patronus Charm.” he stated, allowing the slightest hint of excitement to leak out from his voice

For the umpteenth time that day, he was receiving looks like he’d grown a second head.

After a moment, Remus spoke, something between utter amazement and disbelief in his voice “Harry, how or...why would you even know that particular charm?!”

Harry bit his lip, looking up a bit hesitantly “I, uh, well, before the...trial, I was reading about Azkaban. The book just mentioned that the Patronus Charm was one of the few ways to repel Dementors, the guards of the prison. I tried it, and after a bunch of tries, I finally pulled it off.”

Sirius had paled a bit at the mention of the place that still haunted his dreams, and remained silent.

“How many ‘tries’ did it take you to get it to work?” Remus questioned

Harry shrugged “I’m not sure. A few days I guess. I don’t think I was using strong enough memories at first, but after I did figure it out, it was a really cool spell.”

Remus hit an amused look, thinking of the irony of a Patronus charm being considered ‘cool’, when it fought off one of the foulest creatures know to wizard kind.

Harry, do you mean to say that you can form a ‘corporal Patronus’?” Karin asked calmly, although Harry still detected true curiosity in her eyes, although her years as a lawyer had taught her to hide it well

This made the two men stare again

“You mean one with a form? Yeah.”

“Can you show us?” she asked, just as calmly

Harry nodded "Sure." He lifted his wand "Expecto..." but before he could finish, Remus cut him off

"Harry, wait."

Harry lowered his wand, looking at his uncle questionably "Hmm?"

"Can you..." Remus hesitated "Can you do it silently?"

"Moony, what are you playing at? This spell is hard enough." Sirius interjected

"I'm just curious." Remus stated, defending his actions, although a hint of guilt crept into his words "If he can't do it, that's fine. Really, Harry." he said, reassuringly "I was just curious."

Harry bit his lip, then shrugged. He'd gone this far "Okay."

This raised some eyebrows, but no one spoke

Thinking of one of his most powerful memories, he raised his wand, and a few moments later a great burst of bright white light came pouring out the end of it, temporarily blinding the occupants for several seconds. As their vision began to clear, there were several 'gasps' that echoed throughout the room, as they gazed upon the large, majestic figure standing in the middle of the room, pawing at the air.

"PRONGS" Remus and Sirius breathed together

Several Hours later--around 4:30 in the morning

'STOP THE PRESSES' 'STOP THE PRESSES' came the cry echoing in the newspaper office

The few members of staff of the Daily Prophet that were already there for the day stuck their heads out of their cubicles or offices to see what all the commotion was about.

'STOP THE PRESSES' came the cry again

'MCCOY, What in the world are you hollering about?!' his boss snapped "I thought I told you to go down to St. Mungos to see what that press conference was all about."

"I DID. I DID!" he stated excitedly

"Well don't tell me that's what's got you all riled up?"

"EXACTLY!" he exclaimed excitedly "It's HUGE! It's HUGE!"

His boss rolled his eyes "What in the world could St. Mungos release that would get you all wound up? I thought you said this was going to be some stupid political thing."

"I did! I was wrong. This is the BIGGEST thing to hit since the Pettigrew/Black scandal!"

"That was less then two weeks ago."

"Yeah, well, this comes...really close to topping it!"

"What could top something like that?" he shot back

"JUST the biggest medical breakthrough in the last CENTURY!"

"What?! What are you going on about?"

The reporter was almost dancing around the room with giddiness "A CURE! A CURE FOR THE CRUCATIOUS!"

There were several gasps from his colleges that surrounded him, as well as grunts of disbelief. His boss was looking at him with a great deal of scrutiny.

"If you're pulling my leg, McCoy..."

The reporter fiercely shook his head “You know the Longbottom story, right?”

His boss gave him a ‘Do I look like an idiot to you?’ look “Almost every reporter does.” he growled

“Yeah, well, they were there! Walking, talking...like nothing had ever happened! It was....mind blowing!”

His boss was still giving him a skeptical look

The reporter groaned, although nothing seemed to be able to take away his good mood

“Why would I make something like this up?! That would be career suicide. Besides if you don’t believe me, just turn on the Wizarding Wireless Network. They were there. Every magazine and newspaper within 300 miles was there! Representatives from the Ministry and St. Mungos were on site. As soon as the WWN realized what it was about, they started airing it live!”

At the first mention of the WWN, several people had rushed over to their radio stations, flipping them on. It didn’t seem to matter what station they were on, they all heard the same thing. Everyone seemed to go deathly still as the reporter came on the air.

‘And this just in! We are reporting live from St Mungos, where the most amazing news has just been released! That’s right ladies and gentlemen, a CURE; a Cure for the CRUCATIOUS! YES! As impossible as it sounds, it’s absolutely true! This is what Maria Roberts, Head Healer of the Long Term Care Ward here at St Mungos had to say just moments ago

“We are extremely pleased to announce the creation

of a potion that will revolutionize the way medicine is

researched and examined. A cure has been found that will

reverse even long-term effects of the Cruciatious curse.

According to our Potions Department here at St. Mungos this is perhaps one of the most complicated potions ever created by wizard kind, but the evidence that it works is standing here next to me. “ There was a slight pause as if someone was stepping forward.

“Ladies and Gentlemen, it gives me great pleasure to present Aurors Frank and Alice Longbottom...”

A great many gasps and camera flashes could be heard in the background, and before Maria could say another word, the crowd became so loud with questions, the noise turned into a buzz over the air waves.

The reporters in the Daily Prophet seemed glued to their radios, and for a moment were too stunned to speak. Then all hell broke loose!

“WELL, what are you waiting for?!”

“MCCOY, you’ve got 5 minutes to get an article together and you’d better have a big picture for the front page! MITCHELL, FREEMEN, PORTER, I want all of you down there, NOW! Take at least two camera guys down with you! And when Rebekka gets in, I want her down there as well. She’s got connections with St. Mungos! GO!”

In a matter of minutes, a quiet morning had been turned into a flurry of excitement! As McCoy hurried to his desk to write the story, he heard his boss call out

“STOOOP THE PRESSESSSS!!!”

December 31, 1991. The wizarding world of the United Kingdom awoke to what they believed to be an ordinary day, but as they

brewed the morning coffee, and received their copy of the Daily Prophet or turned on their wireless networks, they were met with the news that this would be anything but an ordinary day. In fact, this would be a day that would be remembered for years to come.

In a high office in Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, a large door suddenly 'burst' open.

"ALBUS! ALBUS! Have you seen this?!" came the excited voice

Albus Dumbledore was sitting behind his sizeable desk, as his transfiguration teacher came bursting through it, nearly tearing the object off its hinges.

"Good morning to you as well, Minerva, and 'yes', as a matter of point, I have seen it."

"This is amazing! Simply amazing!" Minerva gushed "Why didn't you say anything about this? Surely you could have at least given us some sort of warning."

Albus remained calm, sitting quietly behind his desk, his hands folded in front of him "You flatter me, but I'm afraid you over estimate my omniscience. I had no knowledge of this before today."

Minerva's eyes widened a bit "Are you serious? Certainly you would have heard something? Not even a rumor?"

Albus shook his head "I'm afraid not. The first I heard of it was through a letter that arrived early this morning from Cornelius."

"So this is the Ministries doing?" Minerva questioned

"Hardly." scoffed another voice, just entering the room "The Ministry couldn't keep something like this a secret if their lives depended on it."

“Well, someone woke up on the wrong side of the coffin.” came the sardonic reply

Snape sneered “Your attempts at sarcasm never cease to amaze, Minerva.”

“Yes, well, at least I have a sense of humor.” she retorted “And what about you Severus? Not one hint or warning of one of the biggest things to come out of the potion’s community this century?!”

“Well, as much as I hate to admit it” Snape growled “The first I heard of it was when I opened the Prophet this morning.”

Minerva’s eyes narrowed “You’re saying that you didn’t have the first clue that this was being developed?”

Snape just sneered in response.

After a moment of no reply, Minerva spoke again.

“Albus, did the Ministry have something to do with this?”

Albus sighed “As far as I can tell, I believe Severus is correct. They had no news of it until today.”

Now Minerva appeared shocked “You can’t be serious?! Something of this magnitude?! I mean who’s the inventor? This had to have been the result of years of research and study?”

“I agree Minerva, but right now, I’m afraid very little information is known.”

“Or it’s simply not being released.” Severus huffed “There has to be something or someone big behind all this, and the Ministry’s trying to cover it up.?” It was something between a statement and a question

Albus sighed again “As I said, there is very little information at the moment. Cornelius has requested to meet with me, along with several others in just a few hours. Perhaps more shall be revealed then.”

“Albus.” Minerva interjected “This had to be what Augusta was so excited about that day.”

Albus nodded “I’ve considered that.”

“But that was almost two weeks ago. How could...their recovery be kept a secret for that long, and if the Ministry truly didn’t know...”

“That’s your answer right there.” Snape fumed “If those idiots at the Ministry weren’t aware of it, then St. Mungos would have the chance to keep it under wraps.”

Minerva turned on him “Severus, do you have to try and spoil this for everyone. Just because you’re ticked off that you weren’t clued in or some other ludicrous reason like that, don’t go taking it out on anyone who crosses your path! This is GOOD news. Shocking, but good, and if you have the tiniest bit of compassion in you, you might realize that one of your students just received, probably the greatest Christmas gift he could imagine, and one that was stolen from him and his family by some of your fellow comrades!” she growled the last word as she quickly turned, and exited the office

Okay guys, hope you liked that. Let me know. Thanks. Oh, and on another note, I started a forum discussion for this fic. You can access it through my home page. And before I forget, I did actually put up something of a profile as well as several specific details about this fic, such as ships and such. Just thought I’d let you know in case you wanted to go check it out. Well, TTYL.

Midnight Star 25

BLACKOUT

Flashback-well, kind of

“This is UNBELIEVABLE, Albus! Simply unbelievable!” The Minister of Magic appeared frazzled as he paced back and forth in front of the fireplace of his lavish office

Albus sat calmly in a plush armchair “I agree, Cornelius. It is truly wondrous.”

Fudge stopped pacing and stared at him, although his gaze seemed to be distant and unfocused

“WONDROUS?! It’s HORRENDOUS!”

Albus wore a look of puzzlement “I’m afraid I fail to see how the recovery of two victims and hero’s of the war as a negative occurrence; and of course not overlooking the fact that they were the Ministries own.”

Fudge fidgeted nervously “Yes, well...of course that’s positive, but, I mean, there are other factors to consider.” As he plopped down in his chair, he let out a low growl of frustration

Albus let out a mental sigh. He only had an idea as to the problem, and he knew Cornelius had asked him here for a reason, he just had to figure out what that was.

He reverted to his grandfatherly demeanor “Cornelius, perhaps you could elaborate as to the source of your current state of frustration.”

Cornelius’ eyes were now filled with fervor “This potion, Albus! This potion!”

Albus nodded, maintaining his calm, diplomatic stance “Yes, it truly is miraculous.”

“It’s IMPOSSIBLE!” Fudge almost shouted

“Well, I’m afraid the Prophet disagrees...unless you have evidence to support the contrary.”

A hint of anger flared in the Ministers face “That’s the problem, Albus! According to the initial test results from St. Mungos, and, uh, ‘physical evidence’, the potion accomplishes exactly what it’s supposed to.”

“Then why the travesty?” came the maintained calm reply

“It’s...well...I mean...” he groaned “Oh, come on. There’s a meeting down the hall.”

With that, he simply opened the door, and walked out of the room.

A bit taken aback, but his composure ceasing to falter, he quickly followed without a word. Sometimes the best way to access the situation was simply through observation.

Several moments later, the two of them entered a large conference room. An oversized rectangular table was placed in the center, and was currently surrounded by more than fifteen Ministry officials. A loud argument was currently taking place that would have surely stretched to the halls, if not for the silencing charms and security spells upon the room.

“But there has GOT to be a way!” came a loud voice

“I don’t know what you expect my department to do?! They followed the letter of the law!” came the heated reply

“I expect you to find something! There has got to be a detail they missed! A breakthrough this big doesn’t just appear out of thin air, and not without Ministry knowledge on some level!”

“Well, obviously it DID!” huffed another voice, female this time and just as annoyed as the last two “And now we’ve got to fix it!”

“Oh, Stuff It, Delores!” snapped a fourth voice “I don’t even know why you’re here. This doesn’t concern you.”

An evil sneer was sent his way “I’m here Hawkins, because I am the Senior Undersecretary to...”

“Yeah, Yeah. We know your title.” cut in another “But why do we need you here when we have the Minister himself, and further more...”

“You have NO RIGHT to tell me...”

“Oh YES I...”

“Both of you SHUT IT!” came a thunderous voice at the end of the table. Actually, the individual had used a ‘Sonorus’ charm, which was still vibrating throughout the room. As the echoes slowly subsided, the woman next to him looked ready to murder someone.

“Markham, was that absolutely necessary?!” she snapped “I think you just took out my hearing!”

The man shrunk back slightly, but maintained his demeanor “Sorry Amelia, but if those two would stop bickering at every turn, we might actually get something accomplished! Cadmus, are you sure your department knew nothing about this?!”

A figure in a dark robe, what Albus recognized as an Unspeakable robe, and who wore an obstruction charm on his face, answered in a voice that made it impossible to tell whether it was a man or a woman, but held a definite hint of annoyance.

“In light of the current events, I am authorized to admit that we have been researching this subject, but as to date, a solution has eluded recognition. Furthermore, as best we can tell, none of our present employees offered any type of ‘assistant’ in this matter, although we will be going through our past employees as well.”

“As will we!” added another voice, whom Albus recognized as Louis Hardin, the current Head of the Potions Division within the Ministry

“And we’re still working through our current employees, even as we speak.”

“Why go to all this trouble?” questioned another “This doesn’t appear to be a security breach.”

“That remains to be seen!” huffed Fudge, speaking for the first time since entering the room

The rest of the assembled suddenly became aware of the two new arrivals

“Cornelius. Albus. Good Morning.”

“Amelia.” Albus nodded politely

“Cornelius, is there any new information?” questioned Hardin

Cornelius rubbed his forehead, as he sat at the head of the table “I received a reply to my letter.”

He threw a piece of parchment in the middle of the table. At least six pairs of hands reached out to grab it. To much dismay, it was Umbridge who had succeeded in procuring it.

Albus watched as her eyes scanned over the note then quickly throwing it back onto the table in an obvious fit of anger

“They CAN’T be serious!” she burst out

Once again more then a dozen hands shot out to retrieve the letter.

“How dare they believe they can stipulate the conditions of a meeting!”

“Over three weeks? Are they serious Cornelius?” questioned Scrimgeour, who was currently reading the letter

Well, read it aloud.” Huffed another

Scrimgeour gave Fudge a look, who just gave a shrug as an ‘I don’t care’ response. Scrimgeour began reading

To the Illustrious Minister Fudge:

Thank you for your avid interest in the recent release of the potion 'Luminarium'. I too have been eagerly awaiting this potion's debut, and hold high hopes for its continued success. I am greatly honored by your offer to meet, and wish to accept at your convenience. Regrettably, I am out of the country at the present time, and due to the holidays, business responsibilities, and family obligations, the earliest I would be back and available to meet is Sunday, January 20th. I apologize for any inconvenience this may cause you or your colleagues, but I feel that perhaps it's for the best in order to give some of the media frenzy time to subside before either I or my company release a statement. I'm certain you are no stranger when it comes to understanding the burden and weight of the press, and the delicate nature in which that must be dealt with in order to maintain civility, order, and understanding among the people. Thank you for your time, and I hope our future associations to be advantageous.

Most Sincerely,

Jacob P. Myers

Chief Executive Officer

The Mark of Unity Foundation

At the top of the paper the Foundation's symbol was stamped. If anyone had bothered to take a good look at it, they might have noticed a few they might have found interesting. At first glance, you simply saw the earth and two children standing in front of it holding hands. At second glance, you might notice that it was a boy and a girl. You might also notice that there were rays of light coming from around the earth, giving the symbol the appearance of 'glowing'. Then, if anyone had bothered to take an extremely close look with a magnification charm, they might have noticed several details. Both of the children were smiling. The little girl wore a dress and a flower in her hair. A lily to be precise. The little boy wore a long sleeve shirt and slacks. On the bottom of the pants, a small, but majestic stag appeared. The girl wore a dainty necklace that spelled out the word 'Grace'. On the boy's shirt, the tiny letters 'CJ' appeared to be

embroidered onto the left side of his shirt just below his shoulder. But no one did, and the meeting continued.

“Well, that letter was certainly a diplomatic load of...”

“Hawkins.” Amelia warned

He glared

“So you see the predicament we’re in? What does he think we can do? Simply ignore the press?” huffed Fudge

“Perhaps that’s exactly what he expects us to do.”

“But we have to give a statement!” Fudge shot back “We can’t just...”

“We do.” Markham interrupted “We tell them what we know. That St. Mungos is still running tests, and when we have the final results we’ll issue the findings. By the letter, it seems that they will give a statement, just not at the present time.”

“Matthew, what has St. Mungos found out about this potion, so far?”

The man sighed heavily “We’re actually at a standstill right now. We’ve done every test known to wizard kind, and we still can’t figure out this potion.”

“And why is that?” asked Albus calmly, before anyone could cause an outburst

“Well, as you know, when the patent was verified and signed, it gave the potion a magical protection. You know, the standard 5 year protection, so that no one but the patent holder can make a profit off it, or try to copy their work. It magically seals the potions formula from all spells and detection, no matter what the methods. Only the patent holder holds the power to divulge the exact potion formula to an individual”

The man stopped to take a breath before continuing “But, even before that, we had the potion about a month before the patent was

activated, and even then we couldn't figure it out. We had six teams working on this, and none of them could break the code. This has got to be one of the most complex potions ever created. Whoever invented it had to be a certifiable genius, although according to this Myers character, it was multiple people, which is certainly not hard to believe."

"So you're saying that we have no idea what's even in this potion?" came one angry question

"Oh, no. We know what the ingredients are, well, we're certain about most of them. That's the easy part. It's the formula we can't figure out. The directions if you will. Cooking time, portion size, and there's even evidence of a great number of spells that are necessary to perform throughout its creation. It's one of the aspects that made it so difficult in the first place,

"So what, we just wait around for this guy to show up, and tell us the formula?"

A few snickers issued from around the table

"I, uh...seriously doubt that he's going to do that. He went to a lot of trouble to get this patent through as quickly as it did. I highly doubt that he's simply going to hand over the formula."

The room was silent for a moment. No one seemed to know how to respond. Hardin finally broke the silence.

"I still don't understand how he could not be in town for something like this?!" he shot out

"You know him then?" questioned Markham

"Well...no." he admitted with definite irritation

"Does anybody know this guy, uh, what's his name again? Myers?"

"Rufus, do you have that file yet?" asked Fudge, addressing Rufus Scrimgeour, the current Head of the Auror Division

"It should be here momentarily, Minister. We were...having some trouble getting our hands on it." He added, almost shamefully

"And why would that be?" sneered Dolores

Scrimgeour's eyes flashed, but he remained calm, outwardly anyway "It seems, whoever this individual may be is exceedingly well connected. It took me over a dozen floo calls and calling in several favors to even get a copy of this file." He ground out

Several eyebrows were raised at this

"Why so difficult?" questioned Albus, curiosity in his voice

Scrimgeour shrugged "We haven't completely figured that out yet. He's a foreigner, but that's all we really know. There are very few records or even traces of him here within England, although everything we've gone through appears legitimate. I'm hoping this file will give us some answers."

At that moment, an individual walked in wearing Auror robes.

"Ah, Kingsley, did that file arrive yet?"

"Right here, but...uh"

"Kingsley, there's been enough 'uh's' today. I suggest you get to the point."

Kingsley fidgeted "It'll, uh...It'll" he hesitated "It'll self destruct in an hour."

All eyes were now on him, most wide in shock or disbelief

"You'd better be jesting, Shacklebolt." Stated Scrimgeour coldly

Kingsley grimaced. He knew his boss was already in a sour mood from the morning's events, and he just had to be the messenger for this "I wish I was. We apparently...don't have full clearance."

There were several looks of confusions then an outburst.

“We’re the MINISTRY!” shot off Umbridge “What do you mean we don’t have clearance?!”

“The ICW and the IWAN play by their OWN rules!” Kingsley shot back, more than a bit ticked off “Something you should know full well! Oh, and because of the whole clearance issue, this isn’t the complete file!”

Fudge now spoke up, something between anger and confusion in his voice “You’re saying, that not only do we only have this thing for an hour, but it’s not even complete?!”

“Well, actually you’re down to 54 minutes.”

With a quick jerk, Rufus snatched the file out of the Auror’s hand “Get back to work!” He ordered, now completely ticked off. He was not having a good day

Kingsley rolled his eyes, but quickly and gratefully headed towards the door “Oh and I was warned that if you tried to make a copy of the file, it would instantly self destruct, and if you try to take pictures they would turn out blank. The only thing allowed is to take notes.” With that, he turned and left the room

There was a moment of silence, before it was quickly broken

“Well, what are we waiting for?! Let’s open this thing and see what’s so important about it.”

Scrimgeour didn’t move, but simply turned towards Albus. His mind had gone into overdrive “Albus, if this did come from the International Confederation of Wizards (ICW) files, are you able to overrule it?”

Albus looked at the file, then shook his head “Not without going through a committee. Obviously this individual has some type of clout or position on an international level that’s deemed important enough to place restrictive access on his personal information. But simply by

looking at the file, it's not stamped ICW. It's stamped IWAN. I know some people there, but I'm not part of that organization."

"The International Wizarding Allied Nations? But they're like the..."

"Top guys on an international level."

Cornelius sighed "That they are, and I hate dealing with them. Trying to get something out of them is like trying to get a straight answer from a centaur. If we're dealing with one of their guys..." He growled, shaking his head

"Well, perhaps this explains everything." Interjected Amelia

"What do you mean?" asked another

"No, Amelia's right. If this guy is an IWAN agent, it would explain, one, why we've never heard of him. For all we know, this name could be an alias. And two, it would explain why we had no knowledge of this potion. Perhaps the ones, who did know about it or took part in its creation, were under an oath not to reveal anything."

"So you're saying this file could be completely worthless?"

"I'm not saying anything at the moment, except that we need to consider all possibilities, as well as consider the fact that time is ticking."

Cornelius growled at the reminder

Albus cut in "Rufus, how about we take a look now."

Scrimgeour nodded and opened the file, while Fudge spoke softly to a secretary who was already dictating an official record of the meeting.

"Alright, everyone ready?"

Several had charmed quills or were simply ready to take notes.

He quickly scanned the first page, his face contorting as he did

“This guy holds an IWP!” surprise filling his voice

“An International Wizarding Passport? Aren’t those extremely hard to get?” asked one

“Yeah, due to all of the requirements you have to meet.” Commented another

“Doesn’t that mean you’re considered a citizen no matter what country you’re in?!”

“As long as that country’s a member of the IWAN, which most are; there being only a few exceptions, the UK not being one of them.”

“So this guy is a citizen of Magical Brittan?”

“It...would appear that way.” Sighed Rufus

“Doesn’t it also mean that the holder has diplomatic immunity in all of those countries, as well?”

“That’s one reason they’re so highly coveted and difficult to acquire.”

“So who handles punishment in the event of charges being brought against the holder?”

“The IWAN is the only one allowed to put the accused through a trial. If the party is found guilty, then they have the option of punishing the individual themselves, or handing them over to the wizarding government of the country in which the crime was committed for punishment.”

“But how is that...”

“How about we get all the facts, then worry about the details.” Cut in Amelia

“The beginning is always a good place to start.” Added Albus, asserting his grandfatherly demeanor, knowing just how quickly this conversation could turn, considering the current temperaments, not to mention some of the individuals in the room

“Quite right, quite right.” Muttered Rufus, to no one in particular, as he turned his attention back to the file. Rufus ran his finger to the top of the page, then started reading “Name: Jacob Phillip Myers. Date of Birth: January 30, 1963. Age: 27.”

“Wait! This guys only 27?! He’s still a kid!” interjected one of the older members of the group

“Oh, it gets better.” Scrimgeour replied sarcastically “Marital Status: Single. Original Citizenry: Classified.”

“Well, that’s not surprising considering he holds an IWP.” Commented Amelia

“Home Residence: Classified. Current Residence: Classified. Educational History: Classified”

“What is it with this guy?” huffed Hawkins

“Current Employer: The Mark of Unity Foundation”

“The one’s responsible for this potion.” Commented Markham

“Supposedly.” Drawled Hawkins “Although the way it’s looking”

“HMM HMM” Scrimgeour ‘humphed’ clearing his throat loudly. He waited until all was silent, before continuing

“Position: Chief Executive Officer/President. Supervisor: Classified. Past Employment History: Classified”

“How the hell are we supposed to learn anything if everything’s classified?!” snapped Hawkins

“We’re the MINISTRY...”

“Don’t start that again, Umbridge! We don’t need a reminder of what we are! Let’s finish this file before it explodes on us!”

There was an intense glaring match for a few moments, before Fudge interrupted.

“Is there anything they will tell us about him that would appear to be useful?”

Scrimgeour quickly scanned the rest of the file

“Well, here’s his Maste...” he paused, his eyes widening slightly as he pulled out several papers

“His what?” questioned one

“His Mastery?” questioned another

“Masteries, actually.” Clarified Scrimgeour, his eyes scanning with intense curiosity

“You’re saying he holds more than one?”

“Three to be exact.” Stated an impressed Scrimgeour as he handed over the papers to Fudge

Albus, along with several others quickly moved closer to get a better look

“Masteries in Transfiguration, Potions, and...”

“Defense Against the Dark Arts.” Finished Fudge

“And, he holds certificates in Healing as well as Charms.”

“Doesn’t that mean he’s taken the exams and certified, but he just hasn’t gone through the formal training?”

“It appears that way.” Stated Amelia

“So we’ve got a ‘Jack of all Trades’ on our hands.” Came another comment

He received several confused looks, most not having the first clue what he was referring to

He just shrugged it off “It’s a muggle term. You hear stuff like that working in public relations. It just means he’s talented in numerous areas.”

“Thank you, Lemmons for that fascinating tidbit.” Came the sarcastic comment

“Oh can it, Delores. We know your opinions. Everybody knows your opinions.”

“Well, you have to admit that muggles...”

“Have absolutely no bearing on this conversation what so ever.” Amelia snapped, her patience being pushed to the limit “Let’s stick to the task at hand. Cornelius, where did he do his masteries, and with whom?”

The documents were quickly inspected, before Fudge shook his head “I can’t say. Everyplace there’s a signature or location supposed to be listed, it’s magically marked ‘classified’. Same thing with the certificates.”

“Are we sure they’re even authentic?”

“I don’t think we’re sure of anything, except this guy is a complete mystery.”

“Is there anything else in the file?”

Scrimgeour shook his head “No, that’s it.”

“No Birth record? No registration card? No family history?”

"I guess that stuff was left out." He stated through gritted teeth

"You said there were some records of him as a result of his time here in England?" questioned Albus, redirecting the conversation

Scrimgeour nodded "Yes, several, and as I said before, all of the ones we've come across have checked out as legitimate. Most of them have been financial transactions, paper work and permits, as well as other legal documents. We've spoken with Gringotts, but the only thing they would reveal to us is that this 'Mr. Myers' does have an account with them for the Foundation, and the Foundation only. They were incredibly reluctant to reveal anything else. They wouldn't say as to whether he had a personal account, or where the money came from to open the Foundation's account."

"Do you believe it to be stolen?"

Scrimgeour sighed "Right now we really don't know much, although through the records here at the Ministry, we learned that he's not the only one running the company. In fact, he's not the main one."

He received several looks of confusion at this

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, as far as we can tell, it's the Vice President of the company running things on a daily basis. A man by the name of Richard Lawson."

"I think I recognize that name." commented Lemmons "Doesn't he work at Gringotts? I think I remember meeting him through work or something?"

Rufus nodded "He did up until a few months ago. Worked freelance, or something like that. Never could get a straight answer from the goblins on that either, but all of his credentials check out. Native to France. Been a citizen of the UK since 1974. Nothing really that interesting about him."

“Well, if he’s not interesting, who is?! What do we know about this company?”

Fudge sighed “Not much. Only what they’ve legally registered as.”

“And what might that be?”

“I believe the DMLE was going through that. Amelia, do we have a breakdown?”

Amelia nodded, and pulled out a file “So far, we’ve been able to determine that they’ve got their hand in several areas. For starters they’ve obtained permits for potions research, development, production, and distribution. They also operate as an orphanage and a small school.”

At these words, Albus’ curiosity was sparked along with that of several others

“School?”

“Orphanage?”

The questions came almost simultaneously

Amelia handed over the file to Fudge “Yes. A school and an orphanage. In fact, both seem to be run within the same facility.

Albus was peering over Fudge’s shoulder “I was unaware that Hogwarts or any of the schools within Britain lost any of its student body to a new facility, first-years or otherwise.”

Amelia shook her head “No, you wouldn’t be. This isn’t exactly a...traditional school.”

“I’m...afraid you have me at a disadvantage.” Albus replied appearing perplexed

“They don’t teach traditional age students. At least...well, read for yourself.”

Albus, along with Fudge quickly scanned over the rest of the file

“Are they serious?!” Fudge exclaimed first

“I have heard of several attempts to start one over the years, but most have had very little success. Is there any evidence that it’s working? And what about...”

“What in Merlin’s name are you talking about?” snapped Delores

Fudge groaned “It’s a school, Delores, for children.”

This comment received some strange looks, as well as some snickers

“Uh, Minister...all schools are for children.”

Fudge turned a bit ‘red’ at this realizing the mistake in his words

“What I meant was” he started haughtily “that this was a school for younger children. Officially and legally ages 5 to 10.”

Several wide eyes and scoffing came from around the table

“There’s no way they...”

But before they could complete their thought, the forgotten file that had been written off as almost completely worthless suddenly came to life!!!

A sound like a dozen packs of black cat firecrackers exploding all at one reverberated throughout the room, and sparks could be seen issuing from the file!

BANG! POP! CRACKLE! BOOM!

Several people ducked or covered their heads, but none of the sparks ever seemed to touch or burn anyone or anything in the room.

The shower of sparks continued for a few moments, then just as quickly they were gone, and everything from the fire, including the papers that hadn't been in the fire when it 'went off' were all in piles of glowing white ash.

Everyone seemed too stunned to speak for a moment before Markham spoke.

"Okay, that was cool! I definitely vote for that at every meeting!

End Recording

Tears of laughter ran down Harry's face as he finished listening to the recording of the meeting. He could just imagine their expressions!

"That was a stroke of genius!" he exclaimed "They think I'm an IWAN agent. It's...OH, its brilliant! I couldn't ask for a better cover!"

Another man let out a chuckle "Glad I could be of service."

Harry was still grinning and turned towards the man "I cannot thank you enough. That was truly inspired. It makes this look like an international discovery, rather than a local one, and it takes some of the heat off of the company. Not all, by any stretch, but I think it will help." Harry was rambling now

The other man let out another chuckle "Well, it was definitely an interesting challenge, and...of course it helps holding the position of second in command at IWAN. All of your papers and records are in order. They're 'official', and given the highest classification with maximum restricted access. Only a handful of people will have access to them, and even that will be limited. Don't worry. We'll keep them running around in circles."

Harry laughed "I appreciate your offer to help with this, especially since the company will be in the public eye now."

“Always glad to help a Potter. Besides, your grandfather would kill me if I didn’t help his only grandson pull a fast one over on the Ministry.”

Harry’s expression was one of amusement “And here I thought it was simply due to the bond of brotherhood.” He joked

“Oh, it was.” He replied in all seriousness “But I sealed that bond with your grandfather long before I sealed it with the Angels. You know your grandfather and I were best friends, right?”

Harry nodded “We got to know each other a little bit after I joined the Angels, although not that well. The first time I met you, you introduced yourself as my great godfather, and you were there to keep me in line and out of trouble.”

The man chuckled “That sounds like something I’d say, although I’m not sure why. To keep a Potter out of trouble is like taking on a suicide mission.” He stated with a grin “I don’t think your father stayed out of trouble for more than 5 minutes at a time, and I can tell you on good authority your grandfather and I certainly didn’t. Honestly, it’s good to see my godson’s son keeping the tradition alive.”

Harry gave him a half smile, but his expression had become a bit solemn.

The man’s heart went out to the boy in front of him. He was so young, yet had endured so much.

“Harry, is everything alright?”

Harry let out a condescending sniff “Besides trying to take down psychotic murdering lunatics, run a business, take care of my family, deal with an interfering Headmaster, handle classes that are a complete waste of my time, handle my Angel responsibilities, and now deal with the Ministry. Oh, I’m...I’m fine. Just perfect.” His voice dripped with sarcasm

The man shook his head “Now, why don’t you tell me what’s really wrong.”

Harry gave him a calculating look “That was totally sincere.”

The man smiled “Harry, I could always tell when your grandfather was lying, and I got fairly good at reading your father as well. Come on, what’s the real problem? You look exhausted for starters. Do you ever sleep?”

Harry sighed in defeat “A little. It’s rough though. The nightmares don’t help. But you’re right. I’ve got the upper hand as far as Tom and his DE’s are concerned, Fabian’s practically running the company in my absence, my class work and Albus are simply an annoyance, Jerosa is being extremely lenient as far as my Angel duties are concerned, and while I’d rather not deal with the Ministry, I think it’ll be...well, as you said, an interesting challenge.”

The man returned the calculating look “The only one you didn’t mention is your family. Are things not working out with Remus and Sirius?”

Harry sighed again “It’s not that things are bad, they’re just...hard.”

“Well, with family always comes a challenge.”

“Oh, I know that. I don’t expect things to be perfect. I just...” Harry paused “It’s just...Sirius is still having nightmares. He tries to hide it, but...I mean, he knows Occlumency, but his magic is so weak, it makes his shields nearly useless. I’ve been slipping him a special strengthening solution designed specifically for him. So far it seems to be helping, but his recovery is still slow. Twice a week, I’ve slipped him a dose of dreamless sleep at night, although I’m fairly certain he knows about both potions. His sense of smell...” Harry paused, realizing what he was about to say

The man chuckled “You mean about his grim-like animagus form?”

Harry looked up, surprise evident on his face “You knew?”

The man smiled “Your grandfather and I found out during the summer between their 6th and 7th year. Remind me to tell you the story sometime. You’ll get a real kick out of it.”

“You didn’t report it...or make them register?”

The man sighed “It was wartime, Harry. You needed every advantage on your side if you wanted to survive. If you wanted your family to survive...Plus your grandfather never liked the Ministry in the first place.”

This made Harry smile “I guess that’s something else we have in common.”

The man snorted “I think that’s something the majority of the wizarding population has in common.”

This made Harry laugh “Yeah, I suppose you’re right. In truth the Ministry holds very little real power.”

The man nodded in agreement “So, if he knows, has Sirius said something to you?” coming back to the point of the conversation

Harry shook his head “No. He knows it’s there. I just don’t think he knows it’s me. I’m fairly certain he believes Remus is responsible.”

“And if he says something to Remus?”

“Then I might have a problem. They don’t know about my talent in potions...yet. In fact, they know too much already. I can’t believe Remus saw what he did. I was so dim-witted.”

“Harry, you’re being too hard on yourself. It was just a mistake.”

I can’t AFFORD to make MISTAKES!” He burst out “MY MISTAKES get people KILLED!” His face was red, and his eyes were flashing dangerously

The man wore a sorrowful yet knowing expression “That’s the real problem isn’t it? You feel like you’ve screwed up, and you desire desperately to fix it. But you feel helpless because there’s no simple solution to this, short of a memory charm or potion, and even that’s not a simple solution. Leading a double life isn’t easy, Harry. Many of

us within the Angels know this. We're all bound to make mistakes every once in a blue moon."

Harry sighed "I realize that. It's just...I can't. And I have considered that solution. The, uh, memory charms. I want them to trust me. I do. It's just..." Harry paused, running his fingers through his hair

"Have you thought about telling them the truth?"

Harry bit his lip, but nodded "Every time I'm around them. But I dismiss it as quickly as it comes."

The man frowned "Are you afraid they won't believe you or accept you?"

"No." Harry answered with only slight hesitation "No. It'll take some time for them to accept and understand, but...I'm confident that in the end, they'll accept me just as I am. I'm still their best friend's son." He smiled a little at that "And they're still my family, no matter what happens. Albus is right about one thing. Love is one of the most powerful forces in this universe."

The man laughed "I wouldn't advise to let him hear you say that. His ego's inflated enough. But I don't completely understand. If you're not worried about them disbelieving, it might be more manageable for you if you did come clean. At least about the time travel."

"It might." He said slowly "Yet there's still a million reasons to remain silent. The number one reason being this-'It's not their burden to bear.' At least not at the present time. They will have to know the truth at some point, but not today. Sirius just got out of prison, and is still taking the first steps in his recovery. Remus is just beginning to create some semblance of an actual life. One that doesn't involve fear or constant persecution; a life on the run. This is uncharted territory for him, and...well, my truth, is a huge undertaking, and an even bigger responsibility. Believe me when I say that I still feel guilty about placing this burden on the Angel's shoulders,

but..."

Harry, stop.” The older man said gently. He put a hand on the 11-year-old’s shoulder “This is a big undertaking, but it’s exactly the type of thing that each and every Angel has vowed to do from the moment we accepted the offer of membership. And we understand that it’s not only to protect those we love, but to maintain the balance and ensure our future.”

Harry let out a shuddering breath “I know. That’s the only reason I shared any of this. Because we’ve already dedicated our lives to this...call or mission. We weren’t forced to accept their offer. We chose to. We understand the consequences and the price. We’ve accepted it, and we’re willing to pay it, if necessary.” Harry shook his head “I would have been foolish to try and take all of this upon myself. I truly am grateful.”

The man pulled him into a one arm hug.

Harry was slightly taken aback, but didn’t resist.

The man smiled “Harry, I know how old you truly are, but to me, you’ll always be that tiny infant I held on July 31, 1980. Your grandparents were so proud. I’ll never forget that look on your grandfathers face the first time he held you.”

By this point, Harry was working from anger to embarrassment. He’d heard some of this before, but what he’d said was true. He really hadn’t had to chance to know his father’s godfather the first time around, but he planned on changing that this time. Not only had this man known his father, but his grandparents as well. He’d never had the chance to learn much about his grandparents on a personal level. He suddenly felt the urge to ask a question that had been niggling at the back of his mind for a long time.

He looked straight at the man “How did my grandparents die?”

A sorrowful expression crossed the man’s face as he released him from the hug. He didn’t say anything for a moment, so Harry continued.

“The only thing I could ever find out is that they died in the fire in Potter Manor. I felt like there was more to the story, but I really didn’t have much time to try and find out.”

The man’s expression was truly grave as he took a seat “Harry, do you know what separates the Angels from the two extremes in our world. The Light and Dark; in the present time represented by Albus and Voldemort, respectively?”

Harry was a bit confused, but decided to answer “We don’t exploit the innocent for our own agenda.”

The man nodded “That’s right. Voldemort did and will use anyone or anything in anyway if he believes it’ll bring him a single step closer to his goals. Albus believes too much in the ‘greater good’, and the idea that sometimes extreme sacrifices have to be made in order to ensure the future. He’s proven over the years, that he would do almost anything if he believed it would bring about the ‘greater good’. An Angel can’t hold to that philosophy. Do you remember during your initial interview the questions you were asked under vertiserem?”

Harry was still confused, but nodded

“Do you remember your response to the question about sacrifice in regards to your family and loved ones?”

“There were several of those.” Harry retorted “Does this have a point?”

Instead of replying, the man simply continued “The one that asked if you would be willing to sacrifice a family member if you knew it would save a million lives?”

Harry frowned “They started out at a hundred, and went up from there, but yes, I remember it. When I continually answered ‘no’, I thought that would be the end. I figured my mind would be wiped and I would have no recollection the next day.”

“You were assuming they wanted someone like Albus.”

Harry nodded “Thankfully I was wrong.”

“You see, Harry. That’s the thing. We’re willing to pay the price, but we become very...defensive when it’s our families lives on the line. That’s one reason there’s so few couples or even those from the same immediate family that are allowed membership. Jerosa’s daughter is one of the few exceptions, along with a few witch and wizard couples, but, sorry, I digress. The point is that while we’re willing to live with the consequences, we try to keep our loved ones separated from that part of our lives. That’s why we work in shadow, behind the scenes, or within the confines of a false identity. We attempt to take every precaution in order to keep our family from suffering for our life choices and the path we chose to follow, but...” the man took a heavy breath, filled with regret and heartache “Well, sometimes things just...don’t work out.”

Harry shook his head “I still don’t understand.”

“You see, Harry. Your grandfather understood all this.”

Harry wore a confused expression “My grandfather wasn’t a...” he stopped “There’s...there’s no way.”

The man ran his fingers through his graying hair “We were recruited about the same time.”

Harry was in a slight state of shock “My...grandfather was an Angel?!”

The man wore a sad smile “One of the best. His life exemplified every aspect of our beliefs.”

“But...but he was...”

“He was an Order member as well. For a few years, anyway. He was an Angel long before that. When we were recruited, we were both in our mid 40’s. Your grandfather was recruited first. It was shortly after that that he recommended myself for membership. I quickly accepted. The year was 1942, and the war was just starting to rage throughout Europe. It was a desperate and despairing time, but we did what we

considered right. Your grandparents had been married for about ten years. I'd been married for about eight. My wife and I already had one child. Together, our families gave us a reason to fight for what we believed in."

"Is, um, is that why my grandparents died?" Harry asked quietly

"Because he was an Angel?" The man shook his head "No, not...exactly. It was a Death Eater attack. Potter Manor did burn, partially, but that's not how your grandparents died. There's...more to it."

Harry didn't say anything, merely waited, a solemn expression on his face

The man sighed heavily before continuing "The night of the attack both your grandfather and I had been on an Angel mission for the last week. We were suddenly called back due to a series of Death Eater attacks. There were more than a dozen attacks that night, almost simultaneously. One of the last attacks identified was..." He buried his face in his hands, as the memories came flooding back

He took a moment before speaking again. When he did, his voice was hard and broken "One of the last ones was the home of a prominent member of the Ministry, who just happened to be a Muggleborn. The house was just a few miles away from Potter Manor. If you've ever...been out to where it is, you know that it's surrounded by a great deal of land, but there are a few house right above it."

Harry simply nodded. His grandparent's graves were out there, and the manor still stood. He had lived in it for a few years in his last timeline.

"We had just returned to Headquarters after successfully stopping one of the attacks when we received word of an attack in Norwich. When we heard the location, we both panicked. My...wife was staying with your grandmother while we were gone. Of course neither of them knew the details of our work, but they knew we were out there fighting, and they supported us in that. By the time we got there..." Tears welled up in his eyes

He swallowed hard, but continued "The Dark Mark was already above the house of the Ministry official, and the house next to it was on fire. Out of a family of five, no one survived. We were too late. The Death Eaters were already gone...or so we thought."

"They weren't?" Harry asked, dreading the answer

We left the rest of the team, and went to check on our wives. We weren't too worried. The Blood wards were tied to your grandfather, and they hadn't been disturbed. We needed to walk a few hundred feet to get out of the anti-apparation ward that had been put up. We were almost out of it, before...before we found them." His voice choked full of deep sorrow "We never found out exactly what happened, but...well, from some of the things I heard that night, it's quite possible that our wives tried to help the family. We begged them to stay in the house, but..."

It appeared like he was about to break down, but he continued in a broken voice. It seemed as if he was determined to finish.

"We ran up to them, but...we...we could tell when we saw their eyes." The tears were flowing freely now "We were so focused, we didn't realize that we'd walked straight into a trap. Six Death Eaters..."

He shook his head "We fought back. Help came a few moments later. We managed to kill four of them. The other two apparated away when they heard the backup, but...when the dust cleared, your grandfather..." his face was deathly pale, and it was as if he were experiencing the loss all over again

"That's enough." Harry's voice was barely a whisper "That's...I'm sorry."

There was a long bout of silence. Both of them were grieving in their own way. For Harry, at least for the moment, it was simply grieving for the tragic way his grandparents had passed. It was for the reason behind why his grandparents had lost their lives on that fatal night. He was numb, but he knew that he wasn't fully grieving their actual death.

Not yet. He was aware that the reality had not fully consumed him thus far. Although experience told him it was only a matter of time.

For the older of the two, it was reliving the grief, and more tragically, the guilt of everything that night and memory held. It was not only the constant scenarios of 'what ifs' that ran through your head, plaguing your dreams, turning into your worst nightmares. Driving you to the brink of insanity, wondering what you could have done differently; a split second decision that could have changed everything. No. It wasn't solely that. Survivor's guilt also plagued the man in front of him. 'Why did they die?' 'Why not me?' 'I deserved to die. Not them.'

Harry felt guilty for bringing the subject up, but he felt that he understood this man better. It was true what he'd said earlier. He really hadn't known this man very well the first time around. He'd known him as a fellow brother Angel, among other things, but he had been so consumed with his own life and the responsibilities that lay within it, this was yet another example of how personal relationships had taken a backseat in his life.

"I'm sorry." Harry said again

The man shook his head, sense of loss still on his face "No, I am. I'm not sure why I wouldn't have told...before, but"

Harry shrugged "As I said, we only knew each other casually. Both of us always seemed to be on the go. I knew your wife died, I just never asked how. Some things are just...best left in the past."

"True." He admitted sorrowfully "I lost almost everything that night. I buried my wife and two of my best friends. Your grandfather and I had been best friends since we were two-years-old. We always had each other's backs. Your grandmother had so much love for people, and my wife was the most amazing person. It was because of her death that my daughter practically disowned me. She blamed me for her mother's death. She felt that if we had done what she wanted, if we had fled England like she kept begging us to, her mother would still be alive. She hated the war, and from the time she was 15, she was constantly pressing us to leave England until it was over."

Harry stayed quiet. He'd heard part of this before, but he sensed that it needed to be said this time around.

"My son never blamed me. Your father didn't either. At least not verbally. They both had families of their own. My daughter did too, but I think the boys understood my position a bit better." The man sighed heavily "When my daughter first wanted to leave England at 15, I somewhat agreed with her. I talked to my wife about sending her and my daughter away for a time. My son was already grown and married. He was a little over ten years older than his sister. Anyway, my wife refused to go. She said her life was where I was, and she wouldn't leave me." He choked a little at that "So together, we decided that we would stay within England. It was our home, and we wouldn't leave it.

Harry nodded in understanding. England was his home as well. Despite everything that had happened, it was still his home, and He called many of the people within it 'family'.

"Our daughter couldn't understand our decision, so, as much as it pained us, we offered to send her away, if it would give her the security she was seeking. For whatever the reason, Joanna refused the offer and finished her education at Hogwarts. But as soon as she graduated, she turned her back on the wizarding world and disappeared into the muggle one. We didn't even know where she was for over a year. Then one day, just out of the blue, we received an owl from her. She said that she had gotten married, and was living as a muggle. She went on to stipulate that if we wanted to meet him, we would have to pose as muggles. She wanted nothing else to do with the wizarding world or its war. So, we respected her wishes. We were just grateful to have her back in our lives and to know that she was safe, but when my Izzy died, I...well, I lost her all over again. She's refused to speak to me or her brother in years. Thankfully, I'm still on good terms with my son and his family, but I still lost almost everything within a single night."

He ran his fingers through his hair, taking a long breath "I...can't justify not telling you the whole truth in your time line. I can only speculate as to my reasons, but..."

Harry waved him off “I understand why...and you weren’t to blame.” He sighed “Thank you, Jonathan. Oh, and I almost forgot.” Harry pulled a small pendent out of his bag “I thought you might like this. I, uh, gave it back to you the first time around. I thought you might like it this time.”

The man gently turned the coin like object over in his hand “Thank you.” He said quietly “I gave this to your grandfather when we graduated from Hogwarts. It supposedly has magical properties. Your grandfather called it his lucky charm.”

“Oh, and one more thing.” He pulled another object out of his bag.”

Jonathan’s eyes lit up as he saw what it was

“How in the world did you get these?! These are...” the man shook his head “I...Thank you, but how”

Harry just grinned “Hey, I’m an Angel.”

Jonathan let out a small chuckle “No, you’re a Potter!”

The ten days after the press release were beyond crazy! Fabian was forced to field hundreds of questions from the staff, and that was only the first day. After that, Harry had sent out a memo stating that an explanation would be sent out to all staff the day before he, personally, released a statement to the press, and, well not so bluntly, stated that it would be futile to ask Richard any specific questions about the potion due to the fact that he did not know the particulars. He also tried to make clear that ‘no’, the potions department was not responsible for this particular potion.

That was only first problem. The second one was how many owls the Foundation was receiving. Letters, Howlers, ect, and most of them from individuals and businesses that hadn’t even heard of the Unity Foundation till that day. After the first day, Fabian demanded either Harry put up a ward, get someone to do it for him, or he was just

going to start burning the letters by the pile. Harry was actually amused by Fabians mood, but quickly agreed, and snuck out at two in the morning, placing a temporary ward that would redirect all owls to one of the buildings he had purchased as a safe house that was currently not in use. They would still have to sort through it, but Fabian said he would take a team to help him.

The one problem they didn't run into, thankfully to Harry's foresight in this matter, was the fact that they did not receive any unwelcomed or unwanted visitors. All of the buildings Harry owned that were part of the Foundation had a, well, actually it was a combination of several wards that worked together to accomplish a very specific task. There were wards that recognized muggle weapons, malicious intent, and the Dark Mark, barring all from its hallowed halls, but this was a bit more specific. This series of wards was exceptionally powerful, being a combination of wizard as well as goblin. They made it impossible for anyone to enter the building or even the grounds, as was the cases with the safe houses. Well, they made it impossible for anyone to enter if their signature was not specifically keyed into the wards, and only three individuals held that privilege. Harry, of course. Fabian, who handled most of the daily requests, for new clients and such, although Harry kept a close watch and record of each and everyone processed. And the final individual who held this privilege was Jerosa. Harry wasn't about to take any chances when it came to the safety of his staff, clients, or the children in their care.

The company received some pretty nasty howlers because of this, but it was a question of responsibility, and a decision that Harry wasn't about to budge on! He hoped the press release in a few weeks would calm things down a bit, but even if it didn't, he was willing to deal with any problems that arose.

Now that ten days had passed, it was Saturday, and the day before the Hogwarts Express was scheduled to return the students to Hogwarts. It was now, that Harry found himself going to the last place on earth he wanted to be. Hogwarts. Well, actually he was already at Hogwarts. It wasn't the school of which he desired to flee. It was the

office in the school, and the man that presently occupied that office that was acting as an extremely powerful repellent.

He felt as if he was truly back in his original 1st year when he'd gotten caught out of bed, after successfully getting rid of Hagrid's little 'fire hazard'. He felt the same dread he had felt then of being sent to the 'principal's office', well, Headmasters office. Although the basis for his dread were on complete opposite ends of the spectrum. In his original timeline, he had simply been terrified of the idea of expulsion from the first place he had called home. This time, he was far from worried about what would happen to him, but about what extremes Albus might take, if he considered it necessary.

For the last few days, Harry had been arguing with Remus and Sirius. Well, as subtle as he could possibly manage. It had all started when Remus called him in, and informed him that he and Sirius would be taking him back to Hogwarts personally. Harry had mentally groaned. It wasn't that he hadn't expected this, he had just held onto a miniscule sliver of hope that they would let him just go back to Hogwarts, and allow him to deal with Albus in his own way.

Of course he knew that he was waay past delusional in even considering that as a viable possibility, solely within the first two minutes of conversation, but his stubbornness, or...perhaps, stupidity led to his attempt to use several different 'arguments' as to why he should go back to Hogwarts with the rest of his classmates. He first started by simply saying that this was his first year, and he wanted to be with his friends. When that didn't work, he moved on to say that he was afraid that they might tell 'Professor Dumbledore' about his 'advanced' abilities, and that he would be singled out once again. The only thing that came out of that was the reassurance that information would only be revealed when Harry wished it. They went on to say that the only reason they were doing this was because they were worried about Harry's safety, since Albus was the one who had been responsible for placing him with the Dursleys. Harry was touched by their concern, but his determination wouldn't let him give up. By that point, Harry was grasping at straws, and brought up Professor McGonagall, reminding them that she would be there to look out for him as his Head of House.

Well, contrary to the belief that it would hopefully set their minds at some ease, it only complicated matters further. It seemed that Remus hadn't even considered Professor McGonagall before then, but most certainly was now. In fact, that's where they were now. Harry only prayed this would go over with minimum bumps, but considering the group, tempers, and the amount of power in the room, and he wasn't even including his own, he knew some waves were definitely about to be made.

The group of four was currently making their way through the vast halls of Hogwarts.

"We really appreciate you taking your time to do this, Minerva." Remus spoke up

Minerva, who was leading the group, simply nodded "Not at all, Remus. Harry is in my House, thereby my responsibility."

Harry heard the professional, by-the-book tone in which she was using. As a kid, he would have been intimidated; afraid that she didn't care what happened to him, and only saw this as her 'duty'. As an adult, he knew better. He knew just how much she did care about all of her students, and how she held a special place in her heart for each and every Gryffindor.

Nothing further was said as they continued, although Harry knew that Sirius was just itching to say something about Snape. Once Harry had finally given up the ghost of ever persuading Remus and Sirius not to come, he had moved on to work on Sirius, and what he might say during this meeting, that would more than likely make the rest of the year a living hell for him.

Although, in all fairness, he wasn't sure that he didn't expect that anyway. If he had to be honest with himself, he expected Snape to make his life a living hell as soon as he heard the simple fact that Harry was living with two of his mortal enemies, especially Sirius. Snape's demeanor had slightly changed when he had found out that Harry had simply known Remus, but Harry had never changed his, and after two weeks void of any derogatory comments on Harry's part, Snape had gone back to simply ignoring him.

He was brewing his potions to perfection, doing his best to make sure that Snape couldn't find anything to complain about, not that Snape didn't try, exceedingly hard, but Harry always took each lesson and day with great care. He had a strategy going. Every time he felt Snape watching, he would intentionally bring out his, uh, 'Lily side'. That is to say, he would do some small thing that his mother used to do, whether it was something he had read about her doing when she would brew potions or simply do unconsciously in her everyday life.

For example, one time, Harry had felt Snape's eyes scrutinizing his every move. He had just picked up his knife, preparing to cut up one of the roots. Intentionally, he had shifted the knife in his hand to a specific grip, then cutting at a precise angle and in a specific motion. It was something that his mother had always done, but had always annoyed Snape. He said that it was much more tedious, and put more strain on the hand, which Harry had suddenly found Snape barking at him those very reasons as to why he was doing it incorrectly. Well, at least he was noticing. Harry had suppressed a smile, quickly apologized, and adjusted the knife to the way he was being instructed. Then, to make things more interesting, he actually 'thanked' Snape for his 'excellent instruction', and agreed that it was much more effective, receiving first a confused look, then the usual sneer, before his snarky potions master deducted 5 points for his 'cheek', before stalking away. He also received several incredulous looks from his classmates, which he simply ignored. He'd gotten an earful later from Ron and Neville, but he'd made the argument that if they were going to be in his class for the next seven years, he needed to get along with him on some level.

As for today, he prayed they wouldn't run into the Potions Master, or that Sirius wouldn't try to go and seek him out. And, as far as Albus was concerned, well, he was about to find out.

Minerva had just given the password to the gargoyle, and was knocking on the door.

"Come in." came the reply

She pushed the door open "Good afternoon, Albus."

Albus looked up as she entered “Minerva, please come in.”

Before he could say anything else, Harry, Remus, and Sirius made their way in. A hint of surprise briefly flickered in Albus’ eyes, before quickly masking itself.

He stood up, gesturing towards the chairs in front of him

“Have I failed to remember an appointment?” he asked calmly, with a diplomatic air, as the group took seats in front of the large desk

No one answered the needless question. Albus never forgot an appointment.

“We’re here to discuss the situation.” Remus stated. ‘What situation’ wasn’t even a question

Albus nodded solemnly, as he also took a seat “Of course. Perhaps...Harry would feel more comfortable waiting in his common room.” He said slowly

Remus didn’t even hesitate before responding “Harry has requested to remain present. Sirius and I have agreed to this.” His voice held a hint of something that was almost a threat to see if Albus would challenge it

Albus’ eyes seemed to bear down on the boy in front of him, but Harry’s gaze never faltered as he looked directly at the aged man. Harry thought he detected a trace of sorrow or regret in his Headmaster’s eyes, but the next moment, they were quickly masked

Albus adjusted his glasses as he spoke “I see. Well, if that’s the case, then perhaps I should begin...if no one has an objection.” His voice was soft and smooth

No one spoke, so he continued

“For starters, I would like to apologize.”

This raised several eyebrows

“Harry, I would like to apologize for all of the pain you suffered at the hand of your relatives. I assure you that my only intention in placing you there was for your own safety.”

“Sirius, I owe you an apology as well. I was unaware of the last minute change in Secret Keepers.”

“And to you, Remus. If I’d allowed you visitation with Harry; if I’d checked up on him...”

“Are you saying you never checked up on him once!” questioned Sirius, not hiding the anger in his voice

Albus stroked his beard, his true age slowly coming to the surface “Regrettably, I only maintained a watch over the wards protecting him. They were never disturbed. I never believed the danger would come from within the house.”

“You KNEW how Lily felt about her sister!” Sirius snapped

“Sirius!” Remus reprimanded

“But he DID! That was the one place she did not want Harry to go!”

Albus’ face was filled with remorse “I believed she would overlook her prejudice in the case of her sister’s only child.”

“Well, the great Albus Dumbledore finally finds something he’s wrong about.”

“Sirius!” it was Minerva’s voice this time

“No Minerva.” Albus interjected “He’s right. I have made a number of errors in judgment.”

Remus ran his fingers through his hair, sighing heavily “Look, uh...we didn’t come here to fight, Albus. We’re merely...concerned.”

“Well...I'll help in any way I can.”

“That's just it, Albus. We don't want your 'help'.” Remus' voice remained calm, but it was also filled with something else. An emotion that was foreign to Remus, or at least for Remus to be displaying. Harry wasn't exactly sure what the word for it was, but it had to do with stability and control; two concepts that had almost been completely absent from Remus' entire life. Confidence was probably the closest term, but even that didn't do it justice.

“Remus.” Minerva said softly

Remus simply gave her a straightforward look.

She was quiet for a moment, before returning a somber, but understanding nod

“Albus, what Remus and Sirius mean, is that” she paused “They're concerned that you may attempt to arrange an...alternative living situation for...Mr. Potter.” She ended slowly

Albus pursed his lips, and paused before answering “I don't believe any harm shall come to him...within the school wards.”

Harry mentally scoffed. In his original timeline, someone had tried to kill him every school year, usually within the school wards, but he had little time to dwell on this at the moment. Albus' 'answer' or lack of seemed to confirm his guardian's suspicions

“You WILL NOT take him away from us!” Sirius nearly shouted

Albus held up a hand “I didn't say that. I was merely indicating...”

“What, Albus?” Remus snapped “That we're not capable of protecting him?!”

Harry and Minerva remained silent, somehow knowing that this needed to be said

Albus sighed heavily, seemingly aging as the moments dragged on “Only that there is a concern for his safety, and certain precautions that should be...taken into consideration.”

“Were you able to find my home?” Remus asked bluntly

Albus’ expression changed as he examined his ex-student, as if seeing him for the first time “I... presume then you’ve already taken certain measures?”

Remus’ expression was one of triumph, as his blue eyes darkened and narrowed, giving him an air of danger as he folded his arms across his chest “I know how to protect my family, Albus.” His voice was cold, yet filled with strength and power

The silence seemed to stretch eternally, as the room quivered with pure raw magic

Albus waited a time, before attempting to speak again “What do you want?” he asked quietly

Remus didn’t hesitate “Your oath.” He stated plainly “Your oath that you won’t interfere.”

“I’m...afraid that you’ll have to be a bit more specific than that.” Albus responded, after a moment “There are certain...duties and responsibilities here as Headmaster.”

Remus scowled “Your ‘responsibilities’ only go as far as your Headmaster Duties, as far as Harry’s concerned. They stop there.” His voice held a note of finality

“James and Lily wanted us to raise him, if something happened. Not you and certainly not her sister.” Sirius added

Albus sighed heavily, rubbing his eyes “Very well.” He replied softly “I will respect your wishes in this matter.”

Remus shook his head “Sorry, Albus. That’s just...not going to be enough this time. We want an oath. A Wizard’s oath.”

Harry could see a fierce internal debate flashing in Albus' eyes. He hadn't expected this; at least not this specifically. After a drawn out, intense moment he finally spoke

"If it will help put your minds at ease." He said calmly

"It will." Sirius answered shortly "We've even saved you the trouble of deciding what to say." Sirius threw a piece of paper on top of the desk

Albus showed a hint of surprise, but carefully picked up the piece of paper, adjusting his half-moon spectacles as he examined it, slowly reading over it. After a moment, he carefully laid it back down.

"This...is very specific."

"Will you agree to it?" Remus interjected

Albus ran his hand over his face "I wish you could see that I mean you no harm."

"Albus..." Remus started

"But 'yes'." Albus interjected "I'll agree to it."

There was a definite hint of surprise from Sirius and Remus, believing that it would be a much more difficult battle

Albus drew his wand "I, Albus Perciful Wolfric Brian Dumbledore, do so solemnly swear..."

Harry couldn't believe it, but Albus actually made the oath not to interfere with Remus and Sirius in their role as guardians to him, and that he would not remove Harry from their care. It went on to stipulate a few other details, but nothing critical. Harry was actually amazed at how well this was going, but of course sanity or simply calm wasn't something fate allowed very long in his life.

After Harry had felt the swirl of magic, confirming the sincerity of the oath and magically sealing it, Harry felt that he could breath a sigh of

relief. Wrong! As soon as that was done, Sirius brought up another concern. Snape.

That had led into a very long debate or, well 'heated discussion' was probably a better term for what transpired. As always, Albus defended Snape, and as Harry anticipated, Sirius was fighting it every step of the way. Thankfully, the Potions Master was presently away from the grounds for the day, and Albus 'politely' declined in revealing his location.

The meeting had finally come to a close, with Minerva breaking it up. The only thing said in the way of 'farewells' was 'we'll be in touch', coming from Remus.

Harry was rubbing his forehead in frustration as they walked out of the office. He stopped when he heard his uncle talking.

"I'm sorry for dragging you into this, Minerva. I really appreciate all of your help."

Minerva sighed heavily, a weariness on her face "I'm sorry the situation is what it is. I only hope it will improve as time goes on."

Remus nodded solemnly "As do I. Thank you again."

"Of course. And don't worry. If there's...anything, I'll let you know. Sirius, take care of yourself." She added, her voice a touch gentler than her usual stern, by the book tone "I expect you'll be here for the Quidditch games."

Sirius grinned at this "I wouldn't miss them for the world."

Minerva smiled a little "I think we've got a real shot this year with Harry on the team. He definitely inherited James' talent. Well, if you'll excuse me, I need to go finish a few things before the train arrives tomorrow. Harry, the password to the common room is 'Pixies'."

With that, she turned her heel, and disappeared down the hall. In turn, Harry, Sirius, and Remus started walking towards the public Floo.

Harry was still feeling frustrated, and already felt the start of a massive headache, but as they arrived at the Floo, he stopped long enough to give both his godfather and uncle a big hug.

“Thank you...for everything.”

Remus returned the hug “We love you, Harry. If you need us for anything, let us know.”

“That’s right, pup. Anything, and we’ll be here before Snape can...”

“Sirius.” Remus interjected

Harry couldn’t help but smile a little at this “Thanks.”

“Are you sure you don’t want to come back tonight. We can take you to the station tomorrow.”

Harry shook his head “No, it’s okay. I’m already here, and besides, Professor McGonagall said Neville got here yesterday. He might...need someone to talk to before he becomes the unfortunate topic within the Hogwarts gossip system.”

Remus laughed a little “You wouldn’t know anything about that would you?” he joked

Harry rolled his eyes “Don’t remind me.”

Sirius ruffled his hair “Don’t worry. You’re a true Marauder. You’ll make it through. And you, uh, did forget that joke stuff at home? Like Mr. Stick in the Mud here said, right?” he added in a mischievous tone

This made Harry smirk, and Remus shake his head

“Should I just keep owl treats on hand?” Remus asked with a mock groan “For all the letters from Minerva I’m bound to receive.”

Harry smirked again “No, but you might want to keep a pair of earplugs for any Howlers that may come your way.”

Remus let out a real groan, while Sirius just chuckled

Harry gave them another hug “Don’t worry. I won’t get into too much trouble. I enjoy annoying you guys too much.”

Remus couldn’t hide a smile realizing the obvious meaning.

“Alright, well, then we’ll see you in a few weeks at your Quidditch game. Make sure you study hard...”

“Study?” Sirius scoffed “He’s already smarter than most of the dunderhead in this school. He needs to channel his energies into more important pursuits; like winning the Quidditch cup for Gryffindor, and carrying on the Marauder’s legacy.”

Remus glared at him, but Harry just shook his head in amusement.

“Way to pile on the pressure there, Padfoot.” Harry joked

Remus sighed “I don’t know what I’m going to do with the two of you. The both of you are going to get me in so much trouble.”

Harry smiled “I guess it’s a good thing you’re dating a lawyer then.”

Remus groaned “I have a feeling that’s not going to help.”

The three of them talked for a few more minutes, before Harry bid them a final ‘goodbye’ and watched as they flooded out.

He let out a heavy sigh, as he started walking down the hall. It was early afternoon. The castle was quiet, with most of the teachers out, enjoying their last day of freedom before the students returned. There were very few students that had stayed at school for the Holidays, and thankfully, none of them were around at the present moment.

Harry’s mind was anywhere but in the present. His headache was coming on again in full force. His shields were holding strong, but Voldemort was getting exceeding more frustrated with each passing day, and it didn’t help that Harry was once again in close proximity to

the bastard. He was angry, and he was taking it out on Quirrell. Thankfully, as far as Harry could tell, he was still unaware of the fact that the Dark Mark had been activated. Harry was thankful, because he was afraid of what his anger would be like when he did make that discovery, and he had no doubt that he would, but he had a plan for that too.

But for the moment, Voldemort's level of anger and current torture was strong enough that a tiny portion of it was leaking through Harry's shields, resulting in a massive headache and his scar burning. Harry stopped in the hallway, leaning heavily against the wall, burying his head in his hands as a sharp stab of pain shot through his head. He had a high tolerance of pain; higher than most, but because of this blasted connection, the pain Tom inflicted always seemed to be ten times worse.

And if the pain wasn't enough, he was completely stressed to the max from this ordeal with Albus. He paused, taking a moment to evaluate his options. He needed to relieve some stress. A great deal of stress. He felt the urge to let out some of his own anger on Tom, himself, but he knew he wasn't ready to take that step. Not yet. He figured a punching bag, or transfigured form of Voldemort, or any of his Death Eaters for that matter would work for the time being. He knew McGonagall or even Albus might be looking for him, come dinner time, but he could just say that he had asked a House Elf to bring him supper, or had simply eaten in the kitchens. Yeah, that could work. He still had six hours till supper, anyway.

Making his decision, he slipped into one of the secret passageways, and 'Slythered' down to the 'Serpents Lair'. He relaxed a little, as he felt the magic within the Chamber recognize him. It tingled, almost as if it was welcoming him back. He glanced around, before deciding to see if Carnell was there.

As he approached the door, he could hear voices from the other side; 'hissing voices. As he opened the door, he reacted purely on instinct, barely having time, but drawing his wand, as a large object dropped down, right in front of him!

He couldn't see what it was, but before he could register another conscious thought, his whole world went BLACK!

Ohh, CLIFFIE.

Okay, I know I'm evil. I make ya'll wait forever for an update, then leave you at a cliffie. Sorry, but I really haven't done that many cliffies, and this one was way too good to pass up.

As for the next chapter, I'll try to have it out within two weeks. I know that seems like a long time, but between work, church, and school, I just don't have the time I want to dedicate to my writing, but I will try to make this next chapter a priority since it is a cliff hanger, although it may be a bit shorter than these last chapters. This one is a little over 13,000 words.

Oh, and a few notes.

One, if you didn't catch it, or if you did, I mentioned Harry's kids in here. I pretty much gave you his daughter's name, but I only gave you part of his son's name. Here's three clues to help you out

--His first name is not what you typically see in most fanfic's or even a name Rowling used in DH

--His middle name, however, is

--His first name is in honor of Sirius

Think you can guess it? You may have to do a little digging, but I'm confident many of you will figure it out. I'll post the names in the Author notes in the first part of the next chapter.

Two, the name of the potion 'Luminarium'. It's Latin for 'light' or 'lamp'.

Three, the IWAN (International Wizarding Allied Nations). Think of them as the 'Muggle' equivalent of the UN (United Nations), only a

LOT more powerful, and a lot LESS corrupt. Albus is part of the ICW (International Confederation of Wizards). IWAN and the ICW are both on an international level, but IWAN outranks the ICW in a lot of areas. I'll probably give a few more details on this as I go along.

If you have any other questions, or I wasn't clear on something, you can always ask me through a review or PM. If it doesn't give away too much, I'll do my best to answer it.

Thanks for reading.

Midnight Star 25

Exert from last chapter

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Double, Double Serpents and Trouble

The darkness was all around him; all consuming. Or so it seemed. Harry's eyes were shut tight. His head felt like someone had dropped a 1,000 lb weight on it, then didn't bother removing it. Was he dead? He wasn't sure if it was safe to open his eyes to find out or...even if he wanted to find out. It was then he heard a voice 'hissing' close to his ear.

"Massster. Massster."

Harry was surprised. It was Carnell. So he wasn't dead. Had he been knocked out? Was someone else there? Had Carnell unintentionally knocked him out, with his vision? Petrified him, like in his second year? No. That didn't make any sense. The protection spells Harry had placed on the Great serpents eyes should have still been in place, and even if they weren't, it should have killed him, not stunned him, and if he had been petrified, he shouldn't have been able to wake up. Perhaps the spells had simply weakened, but weren't completely inactive. Ohh, he really didn't know.

His thoughts were a complete jumble, but he knew that he needed to open his eyes if he wanted to figure anything out. But before he could, his survival instincts were screaming at him to take precautions. He

moved his right hand over his eyes, whispering the same spell he'd used the first time he'd visited Carnell. It would protect him from anything he might see, like a basilisk's 'deathly gaze.

He slowly opened his eyes. The only light in the dark cavern was coming from a few 'lumonus' charms he had placed around the Chamber, and some light from the open door to Salazar's Study. As he began to sit up, he immediately regretted the decision. His head was pounding, and his body ached all over. His scar still stung, but nowhere near to the degree it had before he had passed out. As he fully sat up, completely against his body's wishes, he was met with the bright yellow eyes of this King of Serpents.

His trained eyes focused on the spells he had placed on the serpent's eyes. He breathed a small sigh of relief. They were still there. Perhaps slightly weakened, but not enough to knock him out the way he had been. Although his next thought was one of pure terror! If Carnell hadn't knocked him out, had Voldemort?! He was the only one who could get down here! What if he had...!!

'WHOA, Whoa Whoa! Slow down, Potter!' His mind seemed to scream at him. 'Think about this rationally. You're not in a body bind, chained up, or under the cruciatus. Or, was he? Could he be under a mind warp? Would Tom have...' WAIT, his mind screamed again. There's no way Tom could have gotten in here, at least not without his knowledge. The first time he'd entered the Chamber, he'd keyed the current wards into himself, and set up several additional ones that would alert him if Tom even attempted to enter the Chamber. He closed his eyes, focusing on the wards and the magic surrounding them. He breathed another sigh of relief. Those wards were still intact, and there were no sign of tampering.

Okay, What in the world was going on?? Now that he was thinking clearly, well, clearer, he knew he wasn't under a mind warp. A mind warp felt like, well it felt real, but, he'd endured them too many times, not to know when he was under one, not that it made them any easier, but this...this wasn't it. No, he was definitely in the real world. As to whether that was a good thing or not, he wasn't sure yet. Perhaps this would be a hell of a lot easier if this was simply a dream. Something that he could wake up from, and find that he was still back

home with Sirius and Remus, or snug in his bed in the Gryffindor Common Room. But, when had life ever been easy for him?

He opened his eyes, as he heard his name again, well, Carnell's equivalent of it.

Massster."

Harry groaned at his headache, as he ran his fingers through his hair.

"Carnell, I told you, it's Harry." He replied in parseltounge, somewhat groggily

"Of course, Master."

Harry let out a low growl "Am I ever going to convince you that I'm not like Tom?" He huffed in an annoyed voice

"As you wish, Master."

Harry sighed, giving up on that particular battle for the moment.

"Carnell, do you know what happened? Did someone knock me out or...or what?" He wasn't exactly sure what to ask

"I'm sorry, Master. I'm afraid that Drefan just became a bit overexcited when you came through the door, but not to worry. It's being taken care of."

Harry now wore a confused expression, as he stood up, brushing off his robes as he did "Uh, who's...Drefan?" It wasn't a name he recognized

He suddenly noticed that another figure was coming into the light. It was a...snake.

"I am." came a small voice

The serpent, which couldn't have been more than 3 to 4 feet long, came to rest next to Carnell. As far as size went, he dramatically paled in comparison to the 50 foot Basilisk.

Harry breathed a small sigh of relief. It was just another snake. He vaguely remembered Carnell requesting to have companions within the Chamber. That must be what this was. But that brought up another question. What kind of snake was this? He'd learned a great deal about magical creatures after Tom started using different varieties in the war, mostly snakes or course. There were only a few that had the power to knock out a wizard like he had been

Harry sent a small smile towards the small serpent "It's very nice to meet you, Drefan." He responded smoothly "My name's Harry."

If snakes had facial expressions, Harry would have said that his would have probably shifted into something of worry or concern. Instead, it was his body language Harry was reading. He shifted somewhat 'nervously' if Harry was reading it correctly.

"Uh, I...I was told to refer to you as m...master." He replied with definite nervousness

Harry noted how young his voice sounded, as he rolled his eyes "Well, I've been trying to convince Carnell to cease his use of that ridiculous title, since the day I met him. I don't own you, or any other creature. There may be a...bond, In some cases, but there is no ownership. I'd much prefer if you simply stick with Harry." He ended lightly, not wanting to scare the snake away

The snake still appeared nervous, as he looked up at the giant serpent.

"Uh, master" Carnell began

Harry let out a small growl "Please, Carnell. Just drop it. That title reminds me too much of your last, well, master. He believed in ownership. I believe in...partnership."

"Very well, Mas...Harry." He replied, almost reluctantly

Harry sighed. It was a start “Thank you, but right now I’m more interested in your friend. May I ask what breed of snake you are?”

The smaller snake looked up at the larger one, before shaking his head “I, uh, I don’t know.”

Harry was confused “You don’t know? Well, only a few species are gifted with the ability to incapacitate a creature in the manner which you so...effectively demonstrated, all of them magical and exceptionally powerful.”

These seemed to be the magic words. The snake now appeared to be very pleased with himself “Really?!” he asked excitedly “So how powerful am I, and can I...?!”

“Drefan!” Carnell said sharply “That’s enough. Stop bothering M...Harry. Now go back over there, ‘till your mother gets back.”

The snake now looked dejected “But can’t I...”

“No, now go.” The tone left no room for argument

There was a frustrated hiss “Yes, Dad.” Was heard, before the young snake turned, and slithered into another part of the chamber

It took a moment, but Harry nearly choked when he realized what he’d just heard!

“D...Dad?!” Harry managed, but in a strangled voice

“Oh, yes. Drefan’s my son. My youngest actually. Well, they were all born the same day, but he was the last one. I truly am sorry about him knocking you out. He was climbing on the rocks above the door frame. When it opened, I think he became overly excited, and fell right in front of you.”

Harry was barely listening as his mind went in a whirl, but he did manage to catch two words. ‘youngest’ and “All?!” he nearly choked out again

Carnell seemed unaware of Harry's distress, and continued in the same manner "Yes. It was just a small litter this time. Only five. Four male, one female. We're actually hoping for a larger one next time."

'Next time?!' Harry felt his headache returning, but this time it had nothing to do with Tom. He needed to sit down. With a flick of his wrist, he summoned a chair, quickly collapsing into it, his body still suffering from the effects of being knocked out, and his mind attempting to process this new information. He reached into his robes, pulling out a tiny plastic box. With a wave of his hand, it was enlarged. He opened the top, pulled out a vial of pain relieving potion, and quickly downed it, before returning to his thoughts.

He'd never thought...He'd never considered...He'd never encountered this, well, he wasn't sure that it was a problem...yet. He'd simply killed this Basilisk in his timeline. He was a second year, and Tom was already controlling him.

What was he supposed to do now? Just because he'd never considered it, didn't mean...Harry was trying to think about this logically. If it had been him, locked up for over 50 years, then almost 1,000 years before that he would definitely...well, uh, be looking for something more than just some chums to hang out with.

Harry couldn't help but laugh a little at that thought. He should have seen something like this coming, but there was nothing he could do about it now...except deal with the repercussions. But before he did anything else...

He ran his fingers through his hair "Well, I can't say I..." He shook his head "Never mind. 'Congratulations.' I hope you find everything you're looking for. May I ask where the rest of your, uh, family is? I'd very much like to meet them."

Harry had been able to spend very little time down here since school had started, and he hadn't really noticed how Carnell was changing, but now that he was paying attention, he could see a dramatic change from his first visit. Simply put, he appeared much happier, and it showed in his voice

“My mate is giving the rest of our younglings a hunting lesson. They should be back soon. We made Drefan stay behind for...obvious reasons.”

Harry chuckled “I appreciate the concern. Speaking of which, do you know the extent of your son’s abilities? Actually, all of your children for that matter?”

“What do you mean?”

Harry shifted in his chair, finding a more comfortable position. His headache was starting to subside, and his muscles were slowly relaxing as the potion worked its way through his bloodstream.

“I mean, that Drefan obviously has the ability to render his victims unconscious. The first question is, did he inherit that particular trait from you, his mother, or something of both. He clearly didn’t inherit your ‘deathly glare’, but he still may have inherited that ability from you, just at a lesser degree. The second question is, what other abilities, if any, does he, as well as the rest of your children, possess. Would it be okay if I talked to him?”

“After what happened, I mean...”

Harry shook his head “There was no lasting damage and it sounds like it was merely an accident. He’s a kid. Believe me he’s going to make more than one of those.”

“But are you...”

“I’m not upset. A little sore, but no worse for the wear. Would it be alright?”

The great serpent nodded “Of course.” He turned his head “Drefan, get over here!” he called out

A moment later, the smaller snake reappeared, wearing the look that look that all children have when they believe they’re in trouble.

“Y...yes?” he asked, almost guiltily

Harry chuckled, knowing that expression all too well “Do you think you’re in trouble?” he asked amusedly

“I...uh, I” he seemed at a loss for words

Harry chuckled again “Don’t worry. You didn’t do anything...deliberately wrong.”

“Wh...what does ‘deliberately’ mean?”

Harry smiled a little at that. He remembered his children asking similar questions whenever they heard a word they didn’t know or understand. It just went to prove that no child, no matter what species, was not born omniscient. They had to be taught.

That thought was actually comforting to Harry. The idea of five little half Basilisks run, uh, slithering around was somewhat...unnerving, to say the least. Deadly glare, vicious fangs, lethal venom, just to name a few; especially around a school, but if he could nip this in the bud, perhaps he could eliminate a problem before there really was one.

“Deliberately means intentionally, on purpose; that you mean to do something. Did you mean to knock me out?”

Wearing an embarrassed expression, he shook his head.

“Then you’re not in trouble. At least not with me. Generally, when I’m knocked out, it’s most certainly deliberate, and definitely with malicious intent. It’s quite...refreshing for it to be void of that.”

The snake still looked worried “But dad was really mad. Mum wasn’t. She said...”

“Drefan!” Carnell snapped

The snake shrunk back at the great serpents tone.

Harry let out a small chuckle. He could only imagine what had been said. Parselemouths were incredibly rare, snakes were generally viewed as revolting by humans, thereby creating a general consensus among both species that the other was evil, and something to stay away from, or worse, destroy when they could.

“Drefan, I think that’s enough ‘telling’ on your parents. Let’s focus on you. For starters, how old are you?”

“Three weeks.” Carnell answered

Harry raised an eyebrow “Impressive.” He muttered

“What?” came the curious question

Harry appeared thoughtful before speaking “Drefan, I’d like to try to answer your earlier question; about how powerful you are. Would you be interested in finding out?” like Harry didn’t know the answer

The serpent’s demeanor changed, as he nodded excitedly.

Harry chuckled “Alright. Why don’t you come up here.” Motioning towards the chair. With a flick of his wrist, he transformed the chair into a small couch.

Harry looked over. Drefan hadn’t moved “Is something wrong?” he asked gently

“Um, what...what about what I did earlier?” he asked, the guilt in his voice coming back

Harry shook his head “Don’t worry you can’t do it again, at least not to me.”

“Why?”

Harry chuckled again. Kids and their insatiable curiosity “Magic.”

The snake still appeared confused

“I’ll explain later. Right now, why don’t you come on up here?”

This time, Drefan didn’t hesitate. As he slithered up next to him, Harry summoned a small rock. He also pulled out a small black book that he used to record anything he deemed important. It was something of a journal, but in this particular book, he only recorded information on the purely magical creatures within his life; including Hedwig, Reyna, and Carnell, so far. He had about 20 of these books, each on a different topic, including one for each section of the Foundation, his family, his friend, classes, Tom, the Angels, the Death Eaters, the ex-Order members, along with a few other topics. Each book was shrunk, and carried on his person daily. Each one also had strong protections, on the off chance that they were to fall into the wrong hands. If anyone, apart from himself, attempted to read them, they would only find the indecipherable scribbling of an eleven year old with really bad handwriting.

He opened the book to a blank page, and using a spell, he ran his hand over the top of the page, recording the date and his location. It was a handy little spell he’d picked up. He could write anything, simply by thinking it, and focusing his magic to write down exactly what he wanted, rather than dealing with the hassle of quills and ink, or using a muggle pen to write.

With another spell, he started taking measurements and such. The entry looked something like this.

Saturday January 11, 1991 Location: Chamber of Secrets, Hogwarts

Summary of entry: Discovery that Carnell has taken a mate, and become a father. Record of said mate and ‘younglings’.

Mate

Name:

Type of animal: Serpent

Gender: female

Species:

Age:

Physical characteristics:

Magical: Yes/No

If yes, Powers:

Other abilities/attributes:

Offspring: 5 known-four male, one female-names: Drefan

Additional Information:

Offspring of Carnell-First litter

One

Name: Drefan-meaning 'trouble' from the Anglo Saxon (he's definitely living up to his name)

Type of animal: serpent

Gender: male

Species: Half Basilisk/half

Age: Three weeks (youngest)

Length/Weight: 3 ft. 4 in. long/ 7lb 2 oz. (will probably grow very quickly due to hybrid status)

Physical characteristics: bright yellow eyes, smooth skin, triangular shaped head, colors-mixture of dark and light brown, hint of yellow or gold and black around pattern, mixture of circle and diamond pattern, fangs-only two at the top of his mouth, although at least an inch long already

Magical: Yes

Powers: Ability to render victim unconscious with single glance (as I found out the hard way),

Other abilities/attributes:

Harry paused in his writing, and turned back to Drefan.

“Alright Drefan, let’s see exactly what you can do.”

With a flick of his wrist, he transfigured the rock he’d summoned into a large rat, using Wormtail as his, uh, inspiration. As he sat him down on the sofa, he squeaked, trying to scamper away, but a moment later, he was magically confined to a single area of the couch. Then he conjured a magical stopwatch, the numbers 0:00:00 written in cloudy numbers in the air.

“Okay. Drefan, I want you to bite the rat, just once. No more.”

Drefan looked confused “Why?”

“I want to determine how quickly your venom has an effect.”

The snake still appeared confused

Harry smiled in amusement “I want to see how quickly you can kill your prey.” Using simpler terms

“Ooh. Okay.” He replied cheerfully

Within the blink of an eye, his head shot out, sinking his fangs deep into the squeaking rat.

The stop watch was started. Harry wasn’t surprised when the creature started twitching within 20 seconds, indicating the venom was now running deep within the bloodstream. Within 45 seconds, the rat was lying on its side, in obvious distress, and at a minute and 17 seconds, the spells indicated the rat was dead.

Harry couldn't help admitting he was impressed. Obviously, it would take longer on a human and larger animals, but it was still remarkable. It was also obvious that his venom was meant to kill, not merely paralyze, and kill very quickly. If you didn't have the right anti-venom or a beazor, well let's just say the odds weren't exactly in your favor.

"Impressive. Very impressive." Harry praised

Drefan appeared even more pleased. Harry ran several more diagnosis charms, determining different aspects of his health, as well as his magic level. When these particular numbers came up, Harry raised an eyebrow. They were exceedingly high. Not as high as that of Carnell, but too high for Carnell to be the only magical parent.

"Carnell, what type of snake is your mate?"

Carnell, who had been observing the tests with avid scrutiny, the way any parent watches their child, answered.

"A Pātālan."

"Really?" Harry asked in surprise "Is she a full blood?"

The snake shook his head "I'm not sure."

Harry nodded thoughtfully, although a strange gleam now flickered in his eyes. A Pātālan. Very interesting. Quite rare. Quite lethal, and undeniably magically strong. Generally, full grown, they grew to an average length of 15 to 20 feet, and could weigh anywhere between 75 to 250 pounds. They were something of a magical mix of several species. While they were native to India, they were believed to have been brought over to England about 600 years prior. They had the size of a standard python, but the venom and fangs of a viper or even a cobra. Add that with their magic, and you had a creature that anyone with half a brain would be smart enough to give a wide berth. Harry had only come across one in his lifetime.

Harry was totally enthralled! The scientist in him had completely taken over. The idea of a pātālan/basilisk hybrid was utterly spellbinding, and he had five of them at his fingertips, not to mention

an incredibly rare Pātālan, one that hopefully wasn't out to annihilate him this time.

He suddenly noticed that Drefan had moved from his side at the couch, to his lap. He was a bit surprised at the young serpent's boldness, but wasn't displeased. He sat the book down, before moving his hand down, coaxing the snake to climb up around his shoulders. Drefan hesitated only a moment, before doing just that. The slick scales of the snake ran across his neck, before coming to rest at the back of his neck, and the base of his arms. As he shifted the snake's weight, he stroked its smooth skin, before scratching its head. Contrary to popular belief, Harry had discovered that most serpents liked that, much like cats, and made a similar noise of contentment; comparable to a 'purr', but more with a 'hissing' to it, which was the noise Drefan was currently making.

As Harry leaned back in the chair, he turned his attention back to his notes.

"Well Drefan, I must say that according to these results, while already wielding a great deal of power and talents, they should only increase as you get older."

The snake wore a look of pure childlike bliss "Awesome!"

Harry chuckled. Kids would be kids "I have to agree. And you didn't just inherit your abilities from your father. Your mother has to be incredibly powerful as well, although unless your mother is a hybrid herself, you inherited your ability to incapacitate your victims with a glance from your father. It probably came as a variation from his ability to kill with a glance, and the fact that he can petrify with an indirect glance. Pātālan's generally don't possess that particular ability."

"By the way." He said, turning his attention to Carnell "I congratulate you on your excellent taste in the opposite sex. It's obvious that she's incredibly powerful. Although" he paused, as if remembering something "If I recall correctly, it's the female Pātālan that chooses her mate, and if that's the case, the praise should go to her for her good taste."

Suddenly, a low hissing laugh caught him off guard “You’re right. I may just like this one.” Came a seductive, almost evil purr

Harry, caught off guard, whipped his head around, searching for where the voice came from. Now that his eyes were adjusted to the dim light, he spotted a large snake slithering in from one of the pipes leading into the forest, followed closely by four much smaller snakes. Behind that, he saw a large object, uh, floating behind them. As they entered the chamber, the object unceremoniously fell hard to the ground. As Harry took a good look at it, he could see that what he had taken as a small deer, was in fact a large goat. An

Anglo-Nubian to be more precise. A large breed of goat native to Great Britain.

Now he was really impressed. It was rare that you ever saw a magical creature actually use magic, which was kind of odd if Harry thought about it. But that was obviously what was happening. This Pātālan was using her magic to levitate her prey back to her home. Fascinating. Once again, the scientist was in his element.

As the quintuplet moved closer, the scientist in Harry suddenly ran screaming, and the warrior in Harry was fighting its way its way to the surface.

He felt his blood run cold, and his heart skip a beat! This was a plot of Tom’s. It had to be. There was no way...it was too much of a coincidence...Wasn’t it?

As the family came to rest next to Carnell, Harry was resisting the urge to draw his wand, although he wasn’t sure he could if he wanted to. He felt frozen in place. Could he have been so naïve? Taken in so easily? It didn’t make sense. None of this made sense.

His thoughts were interrupted by Carnell.

“Ma...Harry, may I introduce my family. This is my mate, Nagini, and the rest of our younglings Ander, Isis, Cyrus, and Solon.”

Harry's mind was still stuck on that first name. Nagini He had spoken way too soon. This was the same Pātālan; the one that had been on a mission to eradicate him! What was he...

His thoughts were interrupted again, this time by the snake he had considered an enemy for almost seven years, before he had successfully destroyed her and the horcrux encased within her.

"Well, I can see my little trouble-maker is already fraternizing with the enemy. It seems I must teach him better."

Harry was still a bit shell shocked, but he hadn't been attacked yet, and Carnell still seemed to be on his side. Without really thinking, he said the first thing that popped into his head

"So you do know what his name means?" It was a stupid question, but he really wasn't thinking clearly. If Tom had appeared in front of him, he would have known exactly what to do, but Tom's snake? He hadn't even been aware that Tom had already taken this particular familiar. He...

That's when it HIT him, as he listened to the snake's answer. He closed his eyes, accessing some of Tom's memories that had to do with the serpent in front of him. Tom didn't have Nagini as a familiar yet. In fact, he hadn't even met her yet.

The snake seemed to smirk "Of course. I knew from the start he'd be the one to cause me the most grief."

Well, she definitely had the same condescending air, but she was...different. She didn't have the same dark aura about her as she had in his time line, when she had been a horcrux. Harry closed his eyes again, finally finding the right memories.

Tom had originally met her in his first year, but not until the end of it, after he had destroyed Quirrell's body. That part of his soul had fled from the castle, making its way deep into the forest. The first snake it had come upon was Nagini. The spirit needed another host, and had lived off snakes before until he could find a human host. He had attempted to possess her, but much to his surprise, he was

unsuccessful. She had blocked him. She thoroughly despised humans, and was magically strong enough to repel Tom's weakened spirit.

While this unquestionably angered Tom, he couldn't help but be impressed. After all, power was his obsession, and to find a creature, particularly a snake, in possession of such a high level was like putting crack in front of an addict.

He possessed another snake, then attempted to charm her into submission. Contrary to popular belief, not all snakes instantly obeyed a parselmouth. Many did, merely because it was so rare to come across one, but others simply had a mind of their own, and Nagini was definitely the latter.

Tom eventually moved on, searching for a human host. It wasn't until after Wormtail returned to him, and he found 'something' of a human body to inhabit, did he desire and need a familiar, and he wanted none other than Nagini. He believed that due to her level of power, her venom would sustain him more effectively in the needed potion than another snake's would.

But when he and Wormtail returned to the forest and sought her out, she flat out refused to go with him. But of course, Tom always had to get what he wanted. He ordered Wormtail to place her under the Impirius curse. He did so. She was able to fight back, using the same mental strength she had used to repel Tom, but the pathetic 'rat' of a wizard, repeated the curse numerous times, until it broke through her defenses. It was only after Tom regained his body, and turned her into a horcrux, did she submit to him willingly.

She was strong, hard headed and a fighter. She despised humans, and if Harry wasn't careful, he would only reinforce that opinion. He was currently thanking his lucky stars that he hadn't acted on his first instinct, and hexed her into oblivion...especially since her son was still on his shoulders. Honestly, he wasn't ready to experience the bite of one of Nagini's children, not to mention Carnell's. He'd been bitten by both of them before. Fawkes' tears had been the only thing to save him from Carnell, and his own had been the only thing with Nagini.

Harry took a deep breath, thinking about what he had to do. It was possible that Tom had already met Nagini this time around. Things were different, and Tom was still romping around the forest after the...Harry froze again! The unicorns! He felt like slapping himself upside the head. He'd completely forgotten, and because he'd kept his shields up and Tom out of his head...

Harry sighed heavily. One problem at a time. Right now, he had to make nice, if he wanted Nagini as an ally rather than an enemy.

He turned his attention back to the family, and in an attempt at a casual tone replied "Well, I suppose all children cause some type of trouble. I think it's in their job description."

Nagini seemed to be giving him a scrutinizing analysis, as her coal black eyes appeared to see right through him, but she remained silent. After a moment, it was apparent that the next move was Harry's.

He stood up, Drefan still on his shoulders, and gave a low bow "I'm afraid I've forgotten my manners." He began smoothly "We haven't been properly introduced. I'm Harry." He paused before adding "I apologize if I've done anything to offend you. I meant no harm nor disrespect towards you or your son." He bent down, lowering his arm, allowing Drefan to slide off, and rejoin his family.

"Mum, I just..."

"Silence Drefan." Nagini ordered "Now you and your brothers and sister go eat. We'll talk about this later." Her tone left no room for argument

Harry heard a quiet, but annoyed hiss, before they turned and started towards their dinner. Well, all but one. One of the young ones was slithering towards Harry, and stopped right in front of him.

"Hi, I'm Solon." came the child's voice "Are you really a human?"

Harry raised an eyebrow, but nodded

"I've never seen one before, but I've heard mum and dad talk about them. Can you really..."

"Solon!" Nagini snapped "Get over there, now."

"Muum. Dad says..."

"I'm well aware of what your father says." She retorted "Right now, you're listening to me."

Reluctantly, the snake turned and made his way toward his siblings.

Harry was torn between taking this seriously and finding the humor in the situation, but as he observed Nagini, he decided that serious was definitely the way to go for the moment.

Harry sat back down, running his fingers through his hair "Is there anything I might possibly do or say that would convince you that I'm not your enemy?"

Nagini turned her attention from her son, back to Harry, her gaze more calculating and accusing than ever "Humans are horrid creatures, only out to destroy my kind."

Harry sighed "I'm sorry you feel that way, and I'm sorry to say that you probably have the right to feel that way about many humans. From the beginning of time, humans have always feared what they don't understand."

"And you do?" Nagini retorted "My mate speaks very highly of you, and I've never encountered a 'speaker' before..."

Harry breathed a sigh of relief. That meant that she hadn't met Tom yet.

"For those reasons alone am I giving you one chance!"

Well, she was certainly not someone to mess with. Not to mention she was a mother fiercely protecting her young; and being seen as the enemy was never a good position to be in.

He bowed his head again “I’m grateful for your generosity. I’ll do my best to deserve it.” Diplomacy was an art, one that Harry had been forced to perfect over the years, due to the many different types of creatures he had to deal with, including goblins, snakes, werewolves, vampires, dark wizards, politicians...all that fun stuff

He could tell that she still didn’t trust him. He had to try something. Sometimes talking was the best way to get things started.

“So, your names Nagini, right?” like he didn’t know “And you’re a Pātālan believed to be descended from the Nāga’s that dwell there?”

Nagini actually appeared surprised “You know my heritage?” she questioned, a hint of curiosity actually leaking out from her stern tone

Harry tilted his head “I’ve done some research. Your kind is originally from India. Most commonly associated with Purāṇic cosmology. According to their legends, your species is believed to have come from one of the seven paradise nether regions or worlds, usually referred to as the atalas’ or regions of Pātāla. Those worlds include Sutala, Vitala, Talātala, Mahātala, Rasātala, Atala, and of course, Pātāla itself; all of which, are home to the Nāga’s, or serpent divinities. For the most part, most of the Purāṇaspeople believe that all Pātālan’s are simply Nāga deities disguised in an earthly form.”

“Although, the more, uh, interesting theory, if I remember correctly, deals with the fact that Nāga’s are most commonly known as guardians. Legend goes on to say that one time, a Nāga was placed on earth to protect an Indian village that was being plagued by an Asuras, one of the demonic elder brothers of the gods. The Nāga completed her mission, successfully banishing the brother back to the depths of the hell in which he came from, but in the course of her work fell in love with a mortal serpent, a King Cobra to be precise. Because her love was so strong, she used her magic to bind herself to her love, believing that once complete, he would be welcomed to return with her, due to the fact that he now shared her deity magic,

and was no longer a mere 'mortal'. Yet, much to her dismay, instead of being welcomed, the other Nāga's banished her, cursing her to live out the rest of her days on earth with her lover. She was banished to the forests just below Kangchenjunga, the highest mountain in India. It was then, they say your species, or Pātālan's first came into existence, when the Nāga mated with the cobra, although this is where the legend becomes skewed to those who believe in it. Some say that because she was a deity, and had granted her mate the same, they would both live forever at the foot of the mountain. Many have claimed sightings of her, even today. Others say, that she was weakened when she transferred some of her powers to her lover, and in the process lost her immortality, only living a few hundred years, before finally dying."

Harry wasn't sure why he felt compelled to repeat this bit of information he'd picked up, but surprisingly, it seemed to be having some type of effect.

The serpent was now looking at him with curiosity, the previous hostility somewhat diminished "Hmmm." She hissed "Perhapss my mate is right in his analysiss. You are interessting. I suppose we'll see." She turned tail, preparing to move towards her children

"Wait, please." Harry called out

The snake stopped, turning back around "Yesss?"

Harry sighed "I have a question. Have any of your children been out in the forest alone?"

The female seemed to 'sniff' at him "Of course not. They're far too young for that."

Harry breathed a small sigh of relief "Good. Because the forest isn't safe for them right now." Harry could tell that the snake was about to say something like 'who are you to tell me what to do', so he quickly added "And I assure you that your mate can tell you 'why'. There's a presence in the forest. A Dark one. One that shouldn't be there."

The serpent's eyes narrowed "All of us within the forest know this. We make it a point to avoid this... 'creature', but how do you know this?"

"Because I warned your mate that he was on the grounds several months ago. I'm assuming you've sensed his presence since then?" turning towards Carnell "I apologize for not asking you about it sooner."

The Great Serpent nodded, almost solemnly "Yes, I recognize his scent, but I haven't approached him, and it's very rare that he's ever in the forest. Perhaps twice per moon cycle."

Harry sighed "I almost forgot about him being in the forest. I was..." he shook his head "Never mind. My main concern right now is the two of you and your children. You said all of the forest avoided him. Why?"

"Because of his 'aura'." Nagini answered shortly "And the fact that he's slain a unicorn. Even we serpents know better than that." She ended haughtily

Harry sighed heavily. So there was already a casualty. How could he have been so... He shook his head. He would have to be more careful in the future...starting now.

"I should tell you this. He's also a 'speaker'. If he were to find out about you, well, more specifically your children, he won't hesitate in an attempt to use them for his own means, and as you saw with the unicorn, he has no problem murdering anyone or anything. He has no respect for even the most basic laws of nature or magic. I would...advise sticking with your current position of avoiding contact..."

"And why should we listen to you. All humans are the same." She hissed, her hard tone returning "Untrustworthy."

Harry internally sighed. No one ever said this would be easy "Humans can be untrustworthy, but...do I have the same 'aura' he possesses?"

“That makes little difference.” She huffed

Harry rubbed his forehead, his headache back in full force. This argument wasn't getting him anywhere, and he still needed permission to do something.

“Well, I won't try to convince you differently, tonight.” He started slowly “And if you'll allow me one thing, I'll take my leave.”

Thankfully, it was Carnell that answered “Of course. Is everything alright with Drefan?”

This made Harry smile “Yes. Drefan's perfect, but...he has some very unique talents that he inherited from the two of you, and, I'm assuming, as did the rest of your children. I'd like to help him and his siblings learn how to control those gifts.”

“And you don't believe we're capable of teaching them what they need to know?” Nagini replied haughtily

Harry grimaced, remembering that Remus had asked Albus a similar question about his and Sirius' ability to protect him. That somewhat shook him. The last thing he wanted to do was start channeling Albus.

“I'm sorry.” He quickly apologized “I didn't mean it that way. I have complete faith in your ability to teach your children what they need to know. You are both 'great' hunters, sly, cunning. You survive, solely, through the means of your own wits and skills, truly relying on no other. You're independent, self-sufficient. You” now addressing Nagini “not only have a great deal of magical ability, but you've learned how to effectively focus and control your magic to work for your benefit. I have every reason to believe that you'll be able to teach your children the same control.”

Harry's words, and the sincerity behind them seemed to be having some type of positive effect, so he dived into the more dangerous territory.

“However...I’m assuming that no less than two of your children inherited a gift that wasn’t from you. Their vision. I’d merely like to...avoid a situation such as the one presented today.”

Nagini’s eyes narrowed “You want to limit their abilities?” she asked, her tone slightly acidic

“Just for a while.” Harry replied, reassuringly “It takes time to learn how to control magic, and until such a time, they will be killing or stunning anything and everything that simply crosses their path, that even catches a glimpse of their eyes...except perhaps snakes. For some reason, it’s said that other snakes are immune.”

“And this is a bad thing?” she retorted

“It could be.” Harry sighed “If they were to come across the wrong creature; a unicorn, a centaur, a...vampire. There’s a small area of land at the edge of the forest that belongs to the vampire community.” Harry threw that last one in, knowing that most serpents respected vampires, mainly because the vampire community revered serpents, and often kept them as familiars, although Nagini was proving not to be like most serpents. However, luck seemed to be favoring him for the moment.

“Well” she started slowly “I would like to introduce them to Drusus and...that would cause problems.” She seemed to mutter to herself, more than him or Carnell

Harry raised an eyebrow “Drusus?” he questioned

The snake seemed to nod “Yes. My bonded; from the ‘Ivess’ clan.”

Now Harry was taken aback. The Ivess clan was one of the larger Vampire clans within England, and highly respected throughout the Vampire community. Their leader, Rais, was part of Vulcan’s inner circle and greatly revered as an exceptional leader. Harry had worked with the vampire communities throughout the majority of the war in his previous timeline, and had managed to meet with Vulcan and his IC twice since he came back. They, like the main creature communities he dealt with, knew about his dual identities and the

time travel, but there was an understood 'code of silence' and secrecy, not to mention numerous oaths that had been taken by both parties.

"Really? You're a bonded familiar? But...you don't live with him?"

"He moves around too much." the snake sniffed "I prefer to stay in one place. He stops by a couple of times every few moon cycles."

"Hmm." he mused "And you know his name. Does that mean that you share a mental or telepathic bond? Or do you understand human speech?" It was rare, but it did happen

"The first." The snake clarified "Our bond allows me to communicate with him."

"Interesting." Harry muttered, for what seemed like the hundredth time that day. The scientist in him was back, and taking mental notes as fast as he could

"Soo" he said slowly "Would it be alright if I placed some temporary charms on your children's eyes, just until they learn some control?"

Harry could tell that Carnell wanted to say something, but they both seemed to know that Nagini had to do this. It was a mother thing. Ensuring that your children were safe and protected. Harry grimaced. That was a...sensitive subject with him, but, on the other hand, he'd better get used to it again, what with Nagini, and soon to be Reyna.

After a long pause, Nagini finally nodded "Very well. For the time being." And with a flick of her tail, she turned, and slithered over to her children.

Harry let out a breath. He'd won this battle. Perhaps not the war, but this battle.

Once she was a good distance away, Carnell spoke up.

"I'm sorry about that Mas...Harry. She's very, uh..." He seemed reluctant to finish the sentence. Serpents had exceptional hearing

“Um, feisty?” Harry supplied

“Well...”

Harry chuckled “She’s a good match for you. You complement each other. I think” Harry paused, then continued “I think she’ll be able to show you a side of this world that you’ve been deliberately barred from.”

“She’s very strong.” Carnell commented

“As are you.” Harry retorted, somewhat concerned with his familiar tone

The great serpent shook his head “Not in the same way.”

“No.” Harry agreed slowly “But you’ve both had different experiences. Salazar imparted you with a great deal of knowledge, but no...practical or life experience to back it up. She, on the other hand, is well rounded in that area; but it’s also obvious that she’s been hurt before, assumingly by humans. You have too, but not in the same way. You were abandoned and locked up by them. I think it’s...safe to assume that she was betrayed in another manner. I stand by what I said a minute ago. You complement each other; and I truly believe that you can teach each other a great deal if you’ll only allow yourselves the opportunity. By the way, I know that Pātālans mate for life. Do Basilisks?”

Carnell nodded “We do; although due to our lifespan, it’s usually the life of our mate, unless it’s another Basilisk.”

“I see. Well, I think you’ve got a good one right now. I think she’ll be an excellent mate and mother; but now, I’d like to meet the rest of your uh, little trouble makers.” he joked

Carnell nodded, before leading him over to his family.

Harry spent the next good while meeting each of the young serpents. It was hard to say who was more interested in whom. The kids

seemed just as interested in meeting Harry, as Harry was in meeting them. They asked him all types of questions about humans, obviously covering bits and pieces of conversations they'd, uh, overheard, probably from Nagini and Carnell, or other serpents they'd met in the forest. The question that Solon had attempted, but hadn't got to complete was if humans could really fly like birds. That led into a detailed explanation of magic, brooms, and somehow, quidditch. He still wasn't sure how they'd gotten into that, but anyway.

Harry found, that while the kids were all curious, they were also very different from each other. Ander was the protective oldest, while Drefan was the troublesome youngest. Isis was the second born and the only girl. Cyrus was in the very middle, and appeared to be something of a rebel. Solon was the fourth one, and asked lots of questions, but much like his name, took his time in his assessments.

Their physical and magical characteristics were also uniquely different, inheriting different characteristics from each parent. Isis and Drefan were the only ones to inherit the ability to knock out their prey with a glance. Ander, on the other hand, had inherited Carnell's full ability to kill with a direct glance, and petrify with an indirect one. Cyrus and Solon had inherited their mother's black eyes, although terrifying in their own right. Ander and Cyrus were also like their father in the fact that they had a full row of fangs on both the top and bottom of their mouths. Isis, Solon, and Drefan only had two fangs at the top of their mouth like their mother. Their venom, however, was just as deadly as Drefan's had been, although Ander and Cyrus could kill quicker with a single strike, due to the amount of venom they could inject with their numerous fangs. They were all somewhere between three to five feet, which was incredibly large for any serpent of three weeks, but didn't surprise him due to Carnell's size.

Harry got so caught up in talking with the family, he never thought to check the time to see how long he'd been knocked out. For him, it had seemed no longer then a moment. After at least an hour had passed, he pulled out his watch.

Oh good, only an hour. Wait, that couldn't be right. He'd been there for well over an hour. He double checked, and what he found made him nearly choke!

2 A.M.!! He'd been knocked out for at least 12 HOURS!!

He collapsed in the chair once again. He was SOOO dead!

Harry sat drumming his fingers on one table in Slytherin's office. It had been five minutes since he'd looked at his watch, but in that amount of time, he'd accessed just how BAD the situation was.

He'd immediately gone to Salazar's office, and used the mirror ceiling to check Albus' office. No one was there, but it was lit up. He pursed his lips, before changing the scene to the Gryffindor Common Room. That's where he came across the end of a conversation telling him just how much trouble he was in.

A sleepy eyed Neville was sitting on the couch surrounded by four adults with various degrees of worry or concern on their faces.

"Are you sure you haven't seen him today?!" asked a obviously apprehensive Remus

Neville nodded sleepily "I'm sure, Mr. Lupin. I received a note from him yesterday saying that he was coming back to school early and wouldn't be on the train. I never got the chance to write him back saying I was already here. That's the last I heard from him."

"Is that all he said?" pressed Sirius

"Umm, yeah." Neville replied

"Mr. Longbottom, I think it might prove beneficial if we were able to take a look at that letter." Minerva said, with a certain degree of calm, although there were visible signs that she was shaken

"W...Why?" Neville asked, the sleepiness leaving him, being instantly replaced by uneasiness

"It may give us a clue to where Mr. Potter has disappeared to." she responded, her stern tone attempting domination, though not quite succeeding

"I, uh, I don't think so, Professor." Neville answered nervously

"Perhaps we could be the judge of that, Mr. Longbottom...unless...there's something you don't wish us to see." Albus said gently

Neville's face went red, while he averted his gaze, suddenly finding his bare feet much more interesting

"Mr. Longbottom" Minerva started sternly "If Mr. Potter..."

"Minerva!" Remus suddenly interjected, somewhat forcefully, effectively silencing her

Remus shot a glance at Sirius, before sitting next to the boy

"Neville." he began, his apprehensive tone, replaced with a much gentler air "Did Harry mention something about the...situation with your...grandmother and uncle?" he asked slowly

Neville's face became even redder, as he twisted his hands almost fearfully, in his lap, but didn't say anything.

Remus took his silence and reaction as his answer.

He sighed, as he ran his hand across his face "Okay, Neville. If you can tell us for certain that the letter will do nothing to help us find Harry, we'll take your word on it."

Neville shifted nervously, but shook his head "I...I'm positive, Mr. Lupin." He said quietly

Remus nodded solemnly "Alright Neville. If you're sure there's nothing else you can tell us, you should probably get some sleep."

Neville stood up, but looked hesitant to move "Is...is Harry going to be alright?" he asked softly

There was a pause before Remus answered "We hope so."

"I think it's time for bed, Mr. Longbottom." Minerva said

"Bu...but I want to help." he stuttered, almost in a whisper

Minerva's eyes softened, but her voice remained stern "You need to let us handle this. We'll let you know what happened in the morning."

Neville still looked hesitant, but took several steps towards the stairs, before stopping, and turning back around, seeming to come to a decision.

"Yo...you know, I pr...probably wouldn't worry about him too much." he said hesitantly, stumbling over his words

The four adults were now looking at him curiously

"Why would you say that, Mr. Longbottom?" Albus questioned gently

He was twisting his hands again, and looked if he were about to say something that would be considered betrayal.

"It...it's just he...he does this sometimes."

Now he definitely had their attention

"What do you mean by that, Neville?" asked Remus quickly "Does what?"

"He...he just" he seemed undecided if he should continue, and the look on his face said that he regretted making this comment

"Neville, it's important." Interjected Sirius "If you think you know where he's gone..."

Neville shook his head "No, it's just..."

"Mr. Longbottom, if Mr. Potter is doing something questionable..." started Minerva

Neville shook his head again "That's not what I meant."

"What did you mean, Mr. Longbottom?" questioned Albus, maintaining his grandfatherly demeanor

"It's just some...sometimes he..." he let out a note of frustration, thoroughly regretting getting into this conversation "disappears." he ended almost inaudibly

This raised several eyebrows

"Mr. Longbottom, perhaps you could explain further." Albus continued

Neville sighed heavily, before giving in "Sometimes he just disappears, but he always shows back up."

"Does Mr. Potter stay out past curfew often?" Minerva asked sternly

Neville quickly shook his head "No. No, I don't think he's ever stayed out past curfew. He just...disappears at times. We've asked him about it before. He says he just needs time to himself sometimes. A quiet place to study or think. That's usually what he tells us."

There was a short bout of silence before Remus spoke up.

"Where does he go at these times?"

Neville shrugged "He's never said. Every time we ask, he just says that everyone needs a quiet place where they can get away to."

"Are there any places you know of that he likes to spend time at?"

"Um, I don't know. The library."

Sirius clutched at his heart "Noo. You're corrupting him Remus."

Remus sent a glare at his best friend "Let's find him first, then you can tell me how much I'm corrupting him."

Sirius' face returned to a serious expression, as he ran his fingers through his hair

"Neville, is there anywhere else he might go?"

Neville scrunched his face in a sign that he was thinking "Well, he likes the Quidditch pitch and he visits Hagrid sometimes."

"What about inside the castle?" asked Remus

Neville bit his lip, but slowly shook his head "I don't know, but...but he knows the secret passageways around the castle." He added hesitantly

"He knows the castle?" questioned Remus

Neville shrugged again "He seems to, but he hangs out with the Weasley twins a lot, and they seem to know everything about the castle."

There was a moment of contemplation before Minerva spoke "Is there anything else, Mr. Longbottom?"

Neville's eyes shifted, but he shook his head.

"Very well. Then it's time for bed."

Without another word, he turned and disappeared up the stairs. Once he was out of earshot, Remus spoke up

"What do you think? Minerva, how well do the Weasley twins know this place?"

Minerva's stern demeanor was slowly diminishing as she spoke "They're only third years, but" she sighed "I'd say they know it as well as the Marauders did." a small, rare smile played on her lips as she said that "If he's been around them...he could be anywhere."

"So where do we start?"

“What are the chances that he’s outside?”

“I still say it’s suspicious that he vanishes just hours after...”

“Sirius.” Remus warns “We don’t have time for that. I’ll go check the grounds. You check the passageways.”

Sirius’ eyes narrowed, still filled with worry “You don’t think he...you don’t think he went...”

Remus sighed, concern also still on his face “I don’t know. I don’t know why he would, but...”

“Would...would you rather I...”

Remus shook his head “I’ll be fine.”

“But you hated...”

“I’ll be fine. We just need to find Harry.” the panic returning to his voice, and without another word, disappeared out the door

“Sirius, where do you think...?” Minerva started, but Sirius was already out the door before she finished her question

She sighed heavily, turning to Albus. She seemed to scrutinize him for a moment before she spoke.

“I know that look, Albus. You’re worried. Do you believe something’s happened to him?”

Albus stroked his beard “I honestly don’t know Minerva, but if he’s still on the grounds, we need to find him.”

“If?” Minerva almost screeched “You do believe there’s another possibility.”

“Please, Minerva. Now’s not the time. This is probably a simple misunderstanding, and right now, we need to...”

Harry didn't need to be here anymore. He silenced the ceiling before collapsing into the chair behind the desk, and on which he was now drumming his fingers.

How was he supposed to get out of this one? His mind was in overdrive. He could only imagine what had happened when he hadn't shown up for supper. Either Minerva or Albus had asked Neville about him, considering there weren't that many Gryffindors back yet. Or perhaps, one of them had come to check on him in the Common room, and found that he wasn't there. Then, curfew had probably rolled around, and he'd still not shown up. He could only guess when Albus had called in Remus and Sirius, and probably as a last resort, or perhaps Minerva had contacted them.

He truly had no idea, nor did he really care at the moment. He only cared about getting out of this in one piece, without having to blow his secret. It wasn't the right time. It just wasn't.

His thoughts turned to Neville. He could tell that Neville felt like he was betraying him by telling them that bit of information. He would have to apologize later for putting him in that situation. He thought back to what he had said. Yeah, it wasn't something he really wanted them to know. It could cause, uh, unwanted attention to where he 'disappeared' to. Not that there was only one place, but...

He stopped. A plan was slowly formulating in his mind. With what Neville said, and what they believed...

He nodded, going over the details. It could work. It just might work.

15 minutes later

Sirius had finally made his way to the sixth floor. Harry folded up his map, shrinking it, and placing it safely in the pockets of his robes.

He pulled out his invisibility cloak, and slipped quietly out of the Room of Requirements. He covered himself with the cloak, before tiptoeing down the stairs that led to the sixth floor, and straight towards Sirius. As soon as he was a few feet away, but in his line of sight, he

contorted his face into one of anxiety, like any kid who's afraid of getting caught.

He slipped into the shadows, but close enough for Sirius to hear him. He lowered his hood, making his head the only part of his body that was visible.

"P...Padfoot." he whispered softly, but loud enough to be heard

Sirius spun around, his eyes darting everywhere

"Padfoot." Harry said again, stepping out of the shadows, although his head was still the only thing that was visible

"James." Sirius muttered, almost inaudibly

Harry felt pity for his godfather, and stepped out the rest of the way, quickly pulling the cloak off, revealing the rest of his body.

"Harry." He said, a bit louder this time, although it was almost a question

"What are you doing here?" Harry asked quietly, draping the cloak over his arm

"Harry." Sirius quietly gasped

Harry suddenly found himself engulfed in a tight hug, well, actually it was more like a vise grip.

Despite the situation, Harry relaxed in his godfathers embrace. He felt the fear he was emitting, and even though he wasn't completely at fault, he still felt guilty for causing his family additional worry and stress.

It was a long moment before Sirius released him, but when he finally did, he ran his fingers through his hair and over his face and arms, seeming to take in every detail, as if trying to assure himself that this was real

Harry put a hand on Sirius' arm "Padfoot, are you okay? You're scared...and you're shaking. Is everything alright?" his voice was soft, filled with genuine compassion

Sirius muttered something incoherently, before trying to incapacitate him again.

When he finally pulled away, his voice was still filled with concern, but also held a hint of, as surprising as it sounds, responsibility

"Harry, where on earth have you been?!"

Harry contorted his face "Why? What's wrong? Is Uncle Moony okay?"

Sirius shook his head, appearing slightly dazed "Harry, you just vanished! Do you know what time it is?!" his voice was slowly gaining a higher pitch

Harry grimaced "Uh, late." He replied lamely "I guess I stayed out past curfew, huh?"

Sirius was looking at him like he was off his rocker or something "Harry, it is Two in the morning."

Harry's eyes widened slightly, as he bit his lip "I, uh, guess I should forget about supper then, and skip right to breakfast."

Sirius choked back something that resembled an amused snort, but quickly reverted back to a serious expression "You scared us out of our wits! I repeat, where were you?"

Harry recoiled "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to." he really hadn't

"Where were you?" Sirius repeated, his voice rising again

"I'm sorry." Harry said again "I just...fell asleep. I didn't realize it was so late." it really wasn't a lie, although you would have to consider being knocked out by a half basilisk 'asleep'

“You were...asleep?” Sirius asked skeptically

Harry nodded slowly “I was relaxing and...”

Sirius waved his hands in front of him “You still haven’t answered the question. Where were you?”

Harry bit his lip again “The...the ROR.” he said quietly

Sirius looked confused “The...what?”

“The ROR.” Harry repeated

Sirius still wore a confused expression

“The C&G room.” He tried

Sirius shook his head

“Umm, I think you guys used to call it the MD.”

“MD...MD” Sirius mused “MD...M...” His eyes suddenly filled with realization

“The Marauder’s Den? How in Merlin’s name did you find that?!”

Harry shrugged “A little house elf told me.” that was perfectly true; Dobby had told him about the room in his original timeline during his fifth year when they were looking for a place for the DA to meet

“A house elf?”

Harry shrugged again “And dad might have mentioned it in his journals. There’s actually a pensive memory of you guys practicing your an...”

But he never completed his sentence, before Sirius clapped a hand over his mouth, dragging him into one of the secret passageways. Only once the panel closed, did he remove his hand.

Harry looked up, slightly confused “What was that for?”

“Marauder rule #5, Harry. ‘Always pay attention to your surroundings’. Even the walls have ears.”

“The portraits.” Harry muttered “Sorry Padfoot. I forgot. I’ll be more careful.”

“I should probably just register.” Sirius murmured, more to himself, then to Harry

Harry fiercely shook his head “No.” he stated firmly “It would look suspicious since they know about Wormtail. I really don’t want to lose my godfather a second time.”

Sirius’ expression softened “Don’t worry Harry. I’m not going anywhere. Although you may be regretting those words in a minute. You are still in major trouble. When Professor McGonagall contacted us, she was nearly frantic, because she couldn’t find you.”

Harry looked down, shifting guiltily “I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to worry anyone.”

“Remus almost...” Sirius let out a growl “Remus doesn’t know.”

“Uncle Moony’s here?”

“You terrified us, Harry. You...” Sirius shook his head “It doesn’t matter right now. Remus and McGonagall will probably lay into you enough as it is. I’m just glad you’re safe.” He pulled him in for one more slightly less bone crushing vice grip

As Sirius released him, Harry shifted uneasily “I, uh, I guess we’d better go find them, huh?”

Sirius started to nod, then suddenly changed his mind “Not yet.” He stated resolutely “I need you to show me where you were first.”

Harry put on a look of confusion, even though he thought he knew the reason “Why? You know...”

“I just need you to show me, Harry.” His voice was firm, but still ‘Sirius’

Without further argument, Harry nodded, before turning, and used the passageway, leading up to the seventh floor.

Sirius followed silently, although Harry could tell that he was lost in thought. He opened the passageway, and led him to the wall opposite of the tapestry of Barnabas the Barmy. He paced in front of it three times, thinking about what he wanted to appear. The door appeared, and Harry pulled it open.

Inside, was a plush, comfortable sitting room. A thick deep-red area size carpet covered an elegant mahogany wood floor. There were several book shelves situated around the room, a desk to one side, a large couch in front of a roaring fire place, casting a low glow around the room, setting off the gold and red Gryffindor draperies that decorated the area.

Harry waved his hand in front of him, as if presenting the room.

“Welcome to my own little oasis in the midst of all this chaos. My own instant library for school or pranks. A quiet place to get away to study or just relax. Maybe do a little plotting.” He said, plopping down on the couch “And the best thing, hardly anyone knows where it is. In here, time doesn’t exist.”

Sirius couldn’t help but chuckle a little, his recent apprehension almost completely diminished “I think I remember James saying something similar.”

Harry nodded “I admit, I stole that from him, but I definitely agree. It’s peaceful in here.” His expression then shifted again “Are...are you going to tell about this? I mean, if they’re looking...”

Sirius sighed heavily, and paused, thinking for a long moment before speaking “No.” he finally answered “No, I won’t tell them. I will have to

tell Remus the truth, but I think he'll agree that you need a little privacy, away from, uh, prying eyes."

Harry jumped off the couch, throwing his arms around his godfather's neck "Thanks Padfoot." He whispered "But...what will we tell them?" he asked, as he pulled away

Sirius thought for another moment, before slowly formulating a story "Well, as Marauder rule #12 states 'stay as close to the truth as possible, without incriminating yourself'. It's less likely that you'll slip up, if you stick as close to the facts as you can."

Harry nodded. He knew this all too well.

"We'll say that...that I found you in one of the places you heard about in one of our stories. You use it as a quiet place to read. You had gone there earlier this afternoon to relax, and I found you there asleep. End of story. Sound okay?"

Harry nodded "Short, simple, and to the point. Marauder rule # 11." He quoted

Sirius chuckled "You have been in your father's stuff. James would be so proud, as am I."

Despite his age, it still felt good to receive positive praise, especially from one of the handful of people in this world he loved more than life itself, and from the first father figure he'd ever known.

"But, right now..." Sirius continued

Harry grimaced, but nodded knowingly "Time to face the music?"

Sirius nodded solemnly "Sorry, pup. If it were up to me..."

Harry gave him a reassuring smile "Don't worry about it, Padfoot. Whatever happens, happens. At least I'll get to prank them later."

This caused a smile to cross Sirius' features as well "Can I help? Pleeassse!" he pleaded, reverting back to his childlike demeanor

Harry couldn't help but laugh "I'll, um, have to talk to Fred and George, but I highly doubt they'll have a problem including one of their all time favorite heroes."

This seemed to boost Sirius' spirits, and the two of them left the room, chatting about nothing but pranks all the way down the numerous flights of stairs, completely ignoring the reason why Sirius was there in the first place. Well, that was, until they reached the third floor, when a loud screech brought them back to reality.

"Mister Potter, where in Merlin's name have you been?!"

Harry shrunk back at the sight of his livid transfiguration teacher, as she rounded the corner, descending upon them, like an angry dragon after you'd been stupid enough to poke it in the eye.

"Uh, Professor McGonagall, I..." he wasn't sure what to say. He looked up at his godfather, who was looking just as uncomfortable as Harry, but, by some miracle, managed to channel the 'adult' Sirius, if he even existed, Harry still wasn't sure, and remained calm

"Minerva, we need to inform the others that Harry is indeed, safe; then perhaps we could clear this up."

Minerva still didn't look happy, but she seemed to realize the truth in his words. Without a word, she turned, brandishing her wand, silently sending out two patroni with the message.

The trio remained in an uncomfortable silence for over a minute, until she received the two replies.

"We're to meet in the Headmaster's office." She stated sternly, before turning her heel and walking towards the very office Harry had been trying to avoid just hours before

As they came to the gargyle, Minerva gave the password, and they proceeded up the stairs. As they approached the office, he could sense that Remus and Albus were already there. He braced himself, upon entering the room.

As the two men's eyes fell upon him, looks of various expressions crossed their faces; For Remus, it was a deep relief; For Albus, it was similar, but for different reasons.

Without a word, Harry suddenly found himself in his uncle's strong embrace. He remained silent, until Remus released him.

"Harry, where have you been?" he asked sharply

Harry bit his lip "I'm sorry, Uncle Moony. I didn't mean to scare anyone."

"Perhaps we should all sit down, and let Mr. Potter explain his side of the story." Albus interjected, in a placid manner

There was a great deal of tension in the room, but the group reluctantly sat, then Albus spoke up

"Mr. Potter, if you would, the floor is yours." He stated smoothly, maintaining his grandfather demeanor

Harry glanced up at his godfather, whom he was sitting next to. Sirius gave him a reassuring nudge seeming to say 'relax and just play it cool'

Harry gave the tiniest nod, and shifted nervously, primarily for visual effect for his audience. This was far from the worst thing that could have happened, and he was prepared to deal with whatever punishment may ensue.

He twisted his hands in his lap "I really didn't mean to worry anyone. I just, uh, needed some quiet time. I lost track of time, and fell asleep. I didn't mean to stay out past curfew. I'm really sorry." His voice was soft and fully guilt-ridden, pleading sincerity

The adults, minus Sirius, were looking at him curiously

"What do you mean, you fell asleep, Harry?" asked Remus

Harry shrugged "I just did. I was reading and just lost track of the time. I guess I fell asleep at some point. Sirius woke me up."

"Sirius found you?" Remus questioned

Harry nodded

"Asleep?" he pressed

Harry nodded again

"And just where, pray-tell did Mr. Black find you?" it was Minerva who spoke this time

"I...I'd rather not say." Harry stated, hesitantly. Minerva looked like she had a biting retort on the tip of her tongue, but Harry cut her off before she could speak "It's...it's not out of bounds or outside the castle or anything like that. It's just a...a special place my dad used to go with his friends."

"It's true, Minerva." Sirius interjected "Harry heard about it from some of the stories we told him. He wasn't anywhere he wasn't supposed to be, merely a location that isn't...frequented. The only rule he broke here was being out past curfew."

Harry saw the curious look he and Sirius were receiving from Remus. He had a look on his face that distinctly said he was trying to figure out exactly what they were talking about. He looked like he wanted to say something, but for the moment was choosing to remain silent.

Harry also caught Albus' intense gaze, his blue eyes magnified behind his half-moon spectacles.

"Are you asking us to simply ignore the last few hours?" Minerva asked testily, although the comment about James seemed to have taken a bit of the edge off

"You must understand, Harry." Albus interjected "That we take the safety of our students very seriously. While you're here at school, you're our responsibility, and..."

But Albus never finished his sentence, before Remus decided to cut in

“Let’s be honest here, Albus. If he had been any other student, it’s more than likely his absence would have gone unnoticed, but because of who he is, he was singled out.”

Albus’ eyes were calculating, trying to decide the best way to handle the current situation “I’m...sure Minerva was truly concerned when she initially contacted you.”

Harry saw Remus wince. That was a low blow.

Remus turned to Minerva, his face remorseful “I apologize, Minerva. I didn’t mean that the way it sounded. We’re truly grateful that you’re looking out for Harry. He’s merely voiced some concerns about being singled out since he started school. We’re attempting to keep things as...normal as possible.

Minerva now wore a thoughtful expression “I see.” She said quietly

Albus regarded the scene for a moment, before speaking “Perhaps we need to take this situation under consideration. It’s quite late, and I’m sure we could all do with a good night’s rest. If Mr. Potter and Mr. Black claim that no regulations were disregarded, other than missing curfew, I think perhaps we can put this matter to rest until the morning.”

Harry was now wearing his own look of confusion. As a kid, he probably would have felt something between relief and dread. Relief for being released that quickly, and dread for what he would have had to face in the morning; but at the moment, he felt neither. He was simply confused. What was Albus doing? It’s almost like he wanted this meeting to be over. Like he wanted them out of there. But why? Why would he...

The next moment, Harry got his answer, and for once he was on Albus’ side in the matter.

Without warning, at least, Harry suspected to all but Albus, the flames in the fire turned green, and a figure stepped out of the floor.

“Headmaster, there’s no evid...” he stopped short, observing the occupants of the room

His expression changed from one of haste, to his usual sneer.

“Well, look what the cat dragged in.”

Minerva rolled her eyes at her colleague’s antics, while Harry simply wished he could just vanish in a puff of smoke...okay, so he could if he wanted to tap into his animagus powers, but that would only stun them for a few moments, and put him in a position he had no desire to be in.

Remus also wore a look that said he probably shared Harry’s opinion of wishing to disappear, while Sirius, on the other hand, wore a look that...well, it reminded him of the look he had received from Nagini earlier. It was just as piercing and just as terrifying.

Harry was having a hard time deciding exactly who was emitting the most loathing, but had little time to dwell on the question as the next comments were made

Snape had sent a death glare towards the three of them. It seemed to be focused mainly on Sirius, but Harry could only imagine what Snape was really seeing. Remus, Sirius, and a young copy of James; sitting there, together. The Marauders-reunited, including the two that had made his school years a constant torture; not that Snape was completely innocent in any sense of the word, but still--Harry knew how deep the hatred ran between Sirius and Snape; it wasn’t as bad with Remus, but it was still there; and as for Harry, well, it was a pretty fair assumption that even the tiniest bit of progress he’d made with the man over the last four months, was about to be put in grave jeopardy. At that moment, Harry was willing to bet a boatload of galleons that this meeting would end on less than friendly terms, a lot less.

There seemed to be a death 'glaring' contest taking place for several seconds, before he turned back towards the fireplace

"I'll speak with you later, Headmaster." He stated, his voice almost frigid

Harry shivered slightly, the magic and emotions in the air almost overwhelming. Snape and Sirius were the main sources, both emitting a great deal of raw power mixed with an unrestrained, unlimited hatred. Minerva was emitting a much lower amount of power than she had been earlier and her emotions had changed from annoyance and concern to, well, her emotions were the same, just for different reasons. Remus was emitting similar emotions as Minerva, but there was also a tiny hint of 'loathing' mixed in there as well, Harry was assuming from the what he'd let slip over Christmas. Albus, on the other hand, was emitting concern, but also, well, Harry could only describe it as 'hopefulness'.

Albus always believed the best in people. The first time around, the old man had attempted to have Sirius and Snape reconcile their differences, and work together, but of course that didn't happen, and this time didn't appear any more promising.

"What's the matter, Sn..." Harry grabbed Sirius' arm, squeezing hard; Sirius scowled, but finished "Snape? Afraid to face..." Harry squeezed again; Sirius didn't say anything further, but Harry knew it was too late as his Potions Master turned around, a look of fury on his face

"If that brat of yours hadn't run away, I wouldn't...!"

"My godson is a worth...!"

Sirius had since shook off Harry's arm and risen to his feet. The two men were now about a foot away from each other. The, uh, heated argument was escalating in both intensity and volume, not allowing anyone to get a word in edgewise, including Albus, although Harry was a bit surprised he wasn't taking drastic action. The hopefulness he had been displaying earlier was now gone, replaced by a deep sorrow.

When Harry heard the term 'slimy, no good Death Eater', Harry immediately felt Albus' eyes fall upon him, and an air of concern sent his way. But for the moment, Harry could really care less. He would deal with Albus later. Right now, he was more concerned with the situation at hand.

Harry wasn't sure how it'd happened, or who had drawn the first wand, but without warning, Spells were currently flying through the air, although nothing appeared lethal...yet.

Harry groaned as another spell flew by, hitting one of Albus' many gadgets. Well, perhaps this needed to be done. Both of these men had a lot of resentment towards the other, and it was probably better that they relieved some of their frustrations in a controlled environment, with witnesses, rather than hiding behind a false persona of neutrality, as Albus had tried to insist upon in his 5th year.

As the spells continued to whiz threw the air, he sighed heavily, and buried his face in his hands.

This was going to be one HELL of a semester!

Okay, okay, not really the way I wanted to end it, but ya'll deserved an update. In the next chapter, you'll see Harry's meeting with Albus.

Did you like the Nagini/ Carnell pairing? I think it's unique; at least I've never seen it before, although I'm sure it's out there somewhere. Did you like their kids? I'll be using them more later.

What did you think about the 'type' of snake a made Nagini. I scoured the internet, trying to figure out exactly what type of snake Nagini was, and came across at least three or four different conclusions, none of which made sense as with the way she's described in canon, so I just made up my own. I gave a few details in the story as to how I came up with her breed, but if anyone's interested in more details, I can start a forum discussion on it. Honestly, I think it works, but that's just me. You be the judge.

Alright, well give me a little time to finish this next chapter. My spring breaks coming up, so I may have a little time, I hope.

Thanks for reading.

Midnight Star 25

SO IT BEGINS

The heated argument between Sirius and Snape was disappointingly anti-climactic. It was abruptly ended with two quick, silent stunners from Albus, both of which, neither man saw coming. There was a moment of silence, before Remus stood up, and flicked his wand, levitating his friend's unconscious form several feet in the air.

"I believe you're correct Albus. We should continue this at a later time." He stated evenly, hiding his true feelings on the situation "Harry." he added, in a voice that every child knows

Without a word, Harry stood, and quickly followed his uncle and floating godfather. They walked in silence until they were several halls away.

Remus turned around. His breaths were shallow, and rapid. His emotions were mixed, battling between frustration, anger, and a sense of relief. Harry wasn't sure what to say, so he did the first thing he thought of. With two strides, he closed the gap, wrapping his arms around his uncle's waist. For a moment, Remus didn't react, then slowly, he returned the embrace. A minute later, he pulled away. Harry spoke first.

"Would it help if I said I was sorry?" he asked softly

Remus appeared to be regaining control, or at least attempting to "I'm...not sure that's going to cut it this time, Harry." He stated slowly

Harry sighed heavily. Honestly, he'd expected this. If Sirius had needed proof, Remus most certainly would.

"Alright, come on."

Remus appeared confused "What?"

"You need to see for yourself." Harry replied calmly "Sirius did too. I understand."

Remus' face contorted "Harry I...wait, I thought Sirius found you?"

Harry grimaced, realizing his slip up. 'Oh, well.' He thought. Remus deserved the truth anyways.

"Uh, Sirius was gonna tell you later."

"Tell me what?" Remus questioned sharply

Harry shook his head "Not here. Are you going to wake..."

Remus' scowl answered Harry's question "Never mind. Come on. This way."

Harry turned, heading towards the opposite wall; drawing his wand, he muttered a phrase, opening a panel to one of the secret passageways. He walked a few steps, before he realized that Remus wasn't following. He went back to the entrance.

"Uncle Moony?"

Remus hesitated only a moment longer, before quickly following without a sound, still levitating Sirius' unconscious form. Harry took note of his uncle's facial expression, as well as the emotions he was emitting. There was still a sense of relief, but confusion, frustration, and even a hint of 'distrust' now dominated.

It was that last one that Harry was worried about. 'Distrust'. He'd just admitted to flat out lying to three authority figures, and he'd done it with a straight...well, a semi-straight face. This was going to take some fast talking and true sincerity to mend even some of the damage.

They walked in silence, as they moved through the passageway between floors. As they reemerged into the halls on the seventh floor, Harry could tell that Remus was deep in thought, barely paying attention to where they were or where they were going. Several times, Harry had to silently reinforce the levitation spell on Sirius, due to Remus' lack of concentration, though Remus didn't seem to notice. They finally emerged from the passageway, and stopped in front of

the blank wall, where Harry had been with Sirius less than an hour ago.

Coming out of his thoughts, Remus realized that they'd stopped. His eyes shifted, taking in the surroundings.

"Where are we?" he questioned bluntly amazing

Harry looked up "You don't recognize it?" he asked softly, although, in all honesty, he hadn't expected him to, considering his current lack of concentration

"Hold on." He added before Remus' had a chance to answer

He walked quickly in front of the wall three times, before the door appeared. He opened it to reveal the same room he'd shown to Sirius. It held a homey feeling, with the only source of light coming from a warm fire blazing away in the fireplace

Harry stepped to the side "You, uh, want to come in?"

But Remus didn't seem to hear him "This is where you were?" he asked instead, his eyes roaming around the room

Harry nodded, then realized Remus wasn't looking at him "Yes." He answered verbally

"How did you find this place?"

"Sirius asked the same thing. Come on in, and I'll tell you."

Remus slowly entered the room, almost forgetting that Sirius was behind him. Harry quickly remedied that by pulling his own wand, and verbally casted a 'locomotor' charm, levitating Sirius over to the couch.

"I guess I'm going to have to get used to that, huh?"

Harry was confused "What?"

Remus just pointed to the wand

“Oh...uh” Harry didn’t trust himself not to say something that would be less than self incriminating. He resigned to remaining silent, while sitting down in the armchair next to the couch.

“Does it...bother you?” Harry finally asked, after a moment of silence

Remus pursed his lips, as he took a seat in another chair, opposite Harry, but didn’t say anything, appearing to be lost in thought.

Remus’ lack of answer seemed to be Harry’s.

“I’m sorry.” He said quietly “If you don’t like it, I can limit...”

“No.” Remus interrupted, cutting him off “I...” he sighed heavily, running his hands over his face. It was obvious that he was out of his element

“It just...surprises me. I’d rather you be honest about your abilities then try to suppress them. You’re...no longer in the muggle world.”

Harry internally grimaced at the honesty bit, but he understood the message, although that disturbed him more than the honesty issue.

“I...would never mistake you for Uncle Vernon or Aunt Petunia.” He replied softly

He met Remus’ eyes, now horror stricken, but also telling him that he had hit the nail right on the head. He sighed heavily, before standing up, and crawling into the large armchair next to his uncle. He wrapped himself around his uncle’s left arm, and laid his head on his shoulder. Remus was slightly taken aback, but didn’t push him away

“I know you would never hurt me.” He added quietly “I trust you.”

“But how can you, Harry?” Remus asked bluntly, a slight quaver in his voice

Harry was taken off guard by the question, but it seemed that Remus' true feelings and concerns were surfacing.

In Harry's opinion and the first thought that came to his mind is that the better question should have been 'How could he not trust Remus?' The only time in his life he had ever questioned Remus' loyalty had been those few minutes in the Shrieking Shack after Hermione had revealed him as a werewolf, and he believed him to have been in cahoots with Sirius, whom he had still been under the delusion, was out to kill him.

Past that, Remus had never given him any reason to doubt. He'd been with Harry, almost till the end, and suffered his own share of tragedies over the years.

Harry mentally groaned. He knew that Remus had been talking to Mrs. Willis, that child psychologist that had originally interviewed him for the trial. He knew, in general, what types of questions he'd been asking, most of which consisted of what he should expect from an abused child.

The problem was that he hadn't been an abused 'child' in years. An abused or tortured adult as a result of the war, yes, and perhaps some of his reactions resembled those of someone who'd suffered the agony of child abuse, but...well, it was different.

The problem Harry had identified a moment ago had to do with 'trust'. He knew that quite often, an abused child, or even adult, will lose their capacity to trust people. They'll be withdrawn, loners, and resist any type of caring or affection they receive.

While Harry would have undoubtedly been like this, had he time traveled back even a few years prior to the end of the war, but he, well, he had learned to 'trust' again, after...after his 'captivity'.

He held tears back at that thought, knowing he couldn't even bring himself to think about that at the moment. It was too painful. For the most part, he'd forced himself to avoid the situation, knowing there was nothing he could do for the time being. He'd only allowed himself

to truly dwell on it twice, yet dismissed it just as quickly. Though that didn't stop it from plaguing his dreams.

He had to deal with the situation in front of him.

"What do you mean, Uncle Moony?" he asked softly

Remus ran his fingers through his hair, obviously confused and somewhat frustrated "I mean...you. I haven't done...and I'm a...From day one you just...and you've never..." he let out a soft growl of frustration

Harry sighed, knowing his uncle needed a rational explanation for everything "I trust you Uncle Moony. I've known I could from the first time I met you. I sensed it."

Remus looked up, surprise on his face, but Harry went on.

"I already knew who you were, through some of dad's memories that he left. I saw how you were with them, and how, uh, how much they trusted you. How much they loved you." Harry fidgeted "The first time I met you, I" he bit his lip "I spent about 5 minutes just w...watching you"

Now Remus did appear taken aback, but didn't interrupt

"I...I don't trust people easily, but it helps that I can sense their emotions. I sensed yours, and they" he pursed his lips as if searching for the right word "they were 'pure'. You didn't want anything from me, or for me to do anything. You didn't have a...an ultimate agenda. You just wanted to meet me, and you...you 'cared' for me. Not many people in my life have ever..."

He paused, before adding "I knew mum and dad were right about you. You and Sirius." He stated, inclining his head towards his godfather "I knew they wouldn't have named him my godfather if they hadn't trusted him completely. You know, Dad never believed you were the spy. He told me so in a memory he left."

At this comment, he saw Remus' eyes brighten, if only in the slightest, but still it signaled to him that this was what Remus needed to hear

"He told me that despite your 'furry little problem' you were a good man, and that your, uh, 'struggles' had only made you stronger, is how he phrased it. He said that if you were" He bit his lip "if you were still alive that you would help me in any way within your power. He told me the same thing about Sirius. I realize I haven't technically known you for very long, or Sirius for even shorter than that, but in my mind I've known you both for – a long time." He stated, choosing his words carefully

"I consider you my family. My real family. Not like the Dursleys. Nothing like the Dursleys. Noth..." His voice had grown hard, and he was suddenly having a hard time controlling his emotions. It was only a quiet voice that seemed to reach out and calm him

"You're our family too, Harry. That will never change."

Harry who had momentarily averted his gaze from Remus, staring into the fire, now shifted to look towards the voice. His godfather was now sitting up on the couch, looking a bit disheveled, though no worse for the wear.

Without really thinking, he let go of Remus, slid out of the chair, and crawled into his godfather's waiting arms. He relaxed a little, as Sirius' arms wrapped around him. He closed his eyes, and attempted to clear his mind, leaning against Sirius' chest.

He missed a questioning and concerned look that passed between his two guardians.

He knew he had to calm down. He hadn't said too much yet, but if he wasn't careful, his emotions would get the better of him, and he'd be spilling his guts long before he needed to. These two men had always been a weakness of his; even though Sirius had died so early on, his memory had been a constant presence. And Remus-well, Remus had

always stood by him, up until the day he was struck down, murdered in the heat of battle, just four years before the war ended.

Nothing was said for a minute, and Harry knew the tension had to be cut-someway. Now that he was thinking clearly, he couldn't think of any better way of accomplishing this then...

"OUCH! HEY, what was that for?!"

Without warning, Harry had wacked Sirius on the back of his head. He shook his head at Sirius' outrage; it hadn't been that hard, though Sirius had shifted him out of his lap, and to the seat on the couch next to him.

"That's for being a hot-headed idiot." Harry huffed indigently, in a childlike manor

Harry noted that Remus couldn't keep a smirk off his face and an amused gleam from his eyes, which he was grateful for.

"Oh, and this from the kid that disappeared for 8 hours. That really hurt." Sirius wined, reverting to his own childlike manor, and rubbing the back of his head dramatically

"Oh stop being such a baby, Sirius. It wasn't that hard."

Sirius scowled "You weren't the one that got hit." Sirius huffed

Remus snickered "Oh, you deserved it and you know it. Harry's right. You were a hot headed idiot. What in the world possessed you to pick a fight with Snape?"

"Hey, he started it." Sirius griped, folding his arms across his chest

Remsu shook his head "That's not what I saw. You were the initiator from where I stood. It was you who..."

"Yeah, Yeah, Yeah." Sirius interjected "Can we stop focusing on me for a moment. Why don't you tell me exactly why we're" he looked around the room "uh, here?"

Remus shrugged “This is supposedly where Harry was. He led me...”

“Oh, I know that much.” Sirius interjected “But why are we here again?”

“Again?” Remus questioned suspiciously “What do you know about this?”

“I, uh, already showed Sirius.” Harry interjected slowly “When he found me...or should I say, I found him.” He added, deliberately adding a hint of guilt to his voice

Now he definitely had Remus’ attention, and Sirius appeared slightly confused as well

“What do you mean ‘you found him’?” Remus questioned, his eyes narrowing

“Yeah, Harry, I mean, I suppose you could say we just kind of found each other, but...”

Harry shook his head “No, I mean-I found you, deliberately. I knew where you were. I knew you were in that hallway.” Harry’s voice was soft, and slightly fearful. He was playing his role as a child exceptionally well; at least he hoped he was.

Now both men appeared thoroughly confused

“How could you – know something like that?” Remus asked

Harry just started down at his hands, a ‘deer in the headlights’ expression on his face. He didn’t respond.

After a moment, Remus spoke again “Harry, I do...” He paused pursing his lips; then he sighed and leaned back, rubbing his hands over his face

“Alright” he sighed “Look Harry. I...we’re not angry.” He said, after shooting a glance at Sirius “We merely want to know what really happened.”

“Harry, I know what you, uh, told me, but if you weren’t here...”

“I was!” Harry interjected quickly, and he had been – for about 5 minutes “I was.” He repeated, this time in a gently tone “And I really did fall asleep. I didn’t mean to stay out past curfew.”

“Okay.” Remus stated, slowly “So you’re saying you didn’t do anything intentionally wrong, except – perhaps, coming here?”

Harry shook his head “No, I told you the truth. This place isn’t out of bounds.”

Remus looked around “What is this place?”

Harry sighed “Well, you may remember it better like this.” He closed his eyes, and focused on a memory he’d seen.

A moment later, the room began to change. Instead of a warm, cozy sitting room, it transformed into a Prankster’s paradise. A Gryffindor’s prankster’s paradise to be precise. Red and gold draperies accented the walls. A large window on the North wall gave a ‘simulated’ view of the quidditch pitch, and a large banner of the Gryffindor crest with an animated Lion in the middle giving silent roars and prowling around the banner. The floors and walls were a light wood, and the room was naturally bright, though no source of light could be seen, except the ‘sun’ gently shining through the simulated windows, as if at sunset. In one corner of the room, a mountain of plush comfy pillows lay, whether to sit on or use for practicing spells or jinxes. In the other corner there was a book shelf, filled with books completely on pranks, including spells, jinxes, counter jinxes, and potions. Next to the book shelf was a large couch, and several matching armchairs, as well as a large coffee table. The other side of the room was filled with two large ‘laboratory’ like tables. Potion ingredients and potion equipment adorned the first table. Other prank items and prank ‘ingredients’ adorned the second. Behind the tables, stood long legged stools, just beckoning the next prankster to begin plotting their next scheme.

Harry watched as both Remus and Sirius took in the surroundings. He felt the change in their emotions. He imagined their memories of this place were coming back.

Remus let out a breath “Merlin.” Remus breathed “I forgot about this place.”

“I didn’t recognize it either. Remember how much time we spent in this place?”

“Actually, I think you and James spent more time in here than I did.”

“Well, we didn’t find it ‘till the middle of our 4th year. At first, we mostly used it for practicing our animagus forms. It wasn’t until later that we figured out it could change, and started using it for planning our pranks. Remember that time we almost got caught by that nosy prefect?”

“Remember the time we did get caught by that nosy prefect?”

Sirius chuckled “Lily always was too smart for her own good. Remember 7th year; she and James used it as their own private mak...”

“SIRIUS!” Remus snapped, warningly, shooting a pointed glance towards Harry

Harry did his best to keep a smile off his face. He knew what Sirius had been about to say.

“Well, it’s true.” Sirius argued “And anyway, he probably already knows if James showed him.”

“What?” Remus questioned, confused “How could James...” He looked at Sirius, then towards Harry

“Through memories.” Harry answered quickly “Some pensive memories, and some mentions of it in his journals. He called it the MD or the Marauder’s Den.”

Remus slumped back in one of the newly formed armchairs “So that’s how you found this place?” Harry couldn’t decide if it was a statement or a question, but he remembered what he had told Sirius and decided to go into detail

“Well, kind of. Dad never gave specific details on how to get to it, just details about the room itself. Once I got here, I asked one of the house elves if they knew where such a room was in the castle. They did, and showed me how to get here and access the room. It’s a quiet place to just get away to. It’s on the 9th floor, which isn’t out of bounds, and there’s no rule saying a student can’t be here.”

Remus held up a hand “Okay, Harry. You’ve established that you’re not out of bounds or breaking any specific school rules. You still haven’t explained how you knew where Sirius would be.”

Harry bit his lip, then turned his back on them for a moment. When he turned back around, he was met with looks of confusion.

His eyes were slightly downcast, and held something of a guilty appearance “I knew where you went also.” He said, almost in a whisper

Now Remus appeared slightly shocked, and greatly concerned “Harry”

Harry looked up “I’m sorry you thought I would go there. I’m sorry I made you go.” Harry’s eyes seemed to boar into his uncles, as if pleading for forgiveness

For a second, Remus just stared at him, then beckoned Harry towards him. The next moment, Harry found himself in his uncle’s embrace.

“I would go to the ends of the earth for you, Harry.” Remus whispered gently

For the second time, Harry felt some of the tension leave his body. He hadn’t been subject to this level of caring in over a year, and no

matter how much he tried to resist at times, he was hungry for it. Desperately hungry.

“I love you, Uncle Moony.”

Remus gave him a tight squeeze “I love you too, cub.” There was a short pause, before he spoke again “But Harry, you need to tell us how you knew where we were. Did the room – do something, or...”

Harry sighed quietly “No, nothing like that.” He stared down at his hands, fidgeting with his fingernails “Did you, um, did you ever wonder why Fred and George idolized you the way they did, er, do?”

Remus shared a glance at Sirius. Sirius just shrugged, having only met the twins once.

“I suppose it crossed my mind.” Began Remus “But I can’t say I gave it much thought. What do they have to do with it?”

Harry pursed his lips “At the beginning of the year; on the train actually, the two of them heard me use your, uh, nickname ‘Moony’. They asked me some questions. I told them that that was your nickname at school and that you were part of the Marauders. They got really excited. I wanted to know why.”

Harry reached into his robes “They pulled out – this. They asked me if I knew what it was. I did from dad’s journals.” He pulled his wand, and tapped the map “I solemnly swear that I am up to no good.” The ink lines began to slowly appear

He looked up, watching the surprise appear on both men’s faces, and with Sirius, there was a mix of pride in there as well. This was only confirmed by the smile that slowly crept across his face.

Being the closest, Remus was the first to finger the parchment, as it slipped from Harry’s grasp to his. He ran his thumb over the names, his eyes hardening as they passed over Wormtail, but softening just as quickly as they passed over the others. After a moment, he handed it over to Sirius. Sirius stared at it for a moment, before

turning it over in his hands, thumbing the sets of initials on the back; JP, SB, RL, and PP.

Sirius shook his head “I never thought I’d see this again.”

Remus looked from the map back to Harry “Harry, are you saying that the Weasley twins had this?”

Harry bit his lip but nodded “They, er, found it in Filches office their first year. Said it took them a while to figure it out. Actually, they never told me how they figured out the pass code.”

“Probably used the back-up system.” Sirius interjected, idly, as he spread the map out onto the coffee table

“The what?” Harry questioned, though he knew what it was

“Oh, we put in a backup system. Don’t really remember why.”

“To ‘see if our kids were true pranksters’ if I remember correctly.” Stated Remus

Sirius nodded, still examining the map “That’s right. We designed the map to ‘talk’ to anyone who tried to figure out what it was. If they remained interested after a few pointed ‘comments’, they were subjected to a series of questions. If they answered satisfactorily, and proved that they were sincere pranksters, they would be given the passphrase. James’ original idea was to use it as a test for our future kids.”

Sirius’ eyes became slightly cloudy and hardened as he said this; probably contemplating the past, and the difference of what could have been from the tragic events that actually took place. Harry wasn’t exactly sure what to do next, so he placed the tip of his wand on the map again, and stated “Exsto Sirius Black.”

With those words, the map flipped open to the 9th floor, and to the area, where all three of their names appeared, along with the room entitled as ‘Marauders Den’. Harry thought back to his 6th year when Draco Malfoy had used this room and it hadn’t appeared on the map

at all. Hermione had been the smart one, and figured out that if you needed the room unplottable, it would be, but right now, Harry needed it to be plottable.

Remus seemed to stare at the names for a moment, before looking up “I suppose James taught you that as well?”

Harry nodded

“And this is how you knew where we were?”

Harry nodded again

Remus leaned back “Why didn’t you tell us about this, Harry?”

Harry bit his lip “I, uh, I don’t know.”

Remus’ eyes narrowed “Harry.”

Harry looked up, a slight hint of guilt in his eyes “I just – didn’t want to get in trouble.” He sighed “And I didn’t want Fred or George to get into trouble either. I guess I was also afraid that you might take it away.” Harry shifted uncomfortably, his hands behind his back.

Once again, Remus’ eyes glanced down at the map, then back at Harry, but before he could say anything, Sirius spoke up

“Of course we wouldn’t take it away, Harry.”

Remus shot Sirius a warning glare.

Sirius’ eyes narrowed “Oh, and you would?”

Remus appeared uncertain, before sighing heavily “I just, I don’t want you to get in trouble, or worse, hurt; or anyone else hurt. This map, it...” Remus shook his head “You’re using it to pull off pranks.” It was a statement, not a question “And Arthur mentioned that Fred and George were pranksters.”

Harry's eyes shifted, but he didn't say anything. There was a moment of uncomfortable silence, before Sirius spoke.

"Well, I for one am extremely proud of him."

Harry beamed slightly at these words, but still said nothing.

Remus rubbed his forehead slightly before speaking "Harry, it's not that I'm not proud of you. You've done very well for your first term. Extremely well from what Minerva tells me; academically, socially, you made the quidditch team."

"Oh yeah, I'm defiantly seeing a problem here, Moony." Came Sirius' voice, heavy with sarcasm "Just pin the title 'Juvenile Delinquent' on him now."

Remus groaned "You know that's not what I mean. It's just" He turned towards Harry "Har, first it was your dad's cloak, and now I know you have this; not to mention this whole thing with Al...Professor Dumbledore and then Snape, I..." He shook his head, a sign that he was out of his element once again

"You're afraid I'll go overboard."

"I know how easy it is to get caught up in the excitement, and I guarantee that you're going to be watched very closely for the rest of this year."

"Oh, stop worrying so much Moony. We were constantly watched as well, and suspected and questioned on everything."

"And we were behind most of it." Remus huffed, indigently

"Not everything." Sirius argued "Just the good stuff."

Harry couldn't hide a slight snort "Come on, Uncle Moony. I haven't even gotten a detention yet."

"Yeah, it's the yet that worries me."

Harry chuckled "Well, as I understand it, all Potters leave a legacy at this school, whether they try to or not. I don't really think it's going to matter what I do or don't have. And besides, didn't you say it was Professor Dumbledore that sent me the cloak. He's going to know I have it and you know; and now you know about the map and the, uh, group projects. I mean, it's just for fun. We're not trying to hurt anyone."

Remus gazed into his nephews face, then shook his head amusedly "Well, I can see you inherited your mother's practical manner, yet your father's silver tongue. Not to mention his gift for mischief making."

Harry bit back a smile, and put on a look of innocence "I don't go looking for mischief, Uncle Moony. It just seems to find me."

"That was always my argument." Sirius agreed

Remus sighed "I'm not going to win this, am I?"

Harry held back a sigh. He would be able to keep the map, at least for now "I'll do my best not to get into too much trouble." He promised

Remus ruffled his hair good-naturedly "What about the trouble you're already in?"

Harry bit his lip, but shrugged "I guess whatever happens will happen."

Remus raised a curious eyebrow "You're not worried."

Harry shrugged again "Not really. After the, uh, Dursleys I think I can handle just about anything. It can't be any worse. Well, Snape might be, but everyone says that Professor McGonagall is fair, and she's my head of house. And I'll accept whatever the two of you decide."

He averted his gaze, in an attempt to appear humble or sorrowful. He was sorrowful in a way, though not sad. More like, apologetic. He hated that he had caused his guardians so much trouble in such a short amount of time.

Remus and Sirius exchanged a look before Remus spoke "I think, this time, there will be no consequences from us. It seemed to be an accident, and it happened at school. But, if something like this should happen again..."

Harry quickly nodded in understanding, the statement left hanging in the air.

"Soo" Sirius began "What do we do now."

Harry pursed his lips. Time to attempt to win one more battle.

Harry slipped quietly into the Common Room. It was about five-thirty, and, thankfully, the minuscule population of Gryffindors had yet to stir. Harry was far from tired. Surprisingly, being knocked out was very refreshing, physically anyway. Actually, it was probably the most sleep he'd gotten in one go since...er, well, most certainly since he'd come back, but the more he thought about it, it was probably the most he'd had in several years. Most of the war had consisted of simply surviving day to day, and for him, that meant extremely early mornings, and very late nights, and even now, with little immediate danger, his body still didn't allow him to break the cycle, though there had been very little effort on his part towards the change. He simply didn't want it.

He sighed. His head was hurting again; thought this time, he thought it had more to do with the conversations he had just had, and the quick thinking he had had to do; but in the end, it had payed off. He had convinced Remus and Sirius to go on home, and let Minerva go with him to, well, whatever this meeting was about for whatever Albus had on his mind. He shook his head. This was going to be a long day.

He slipped up the stairs, and into the 1st year's bedchamber.

The sole sound from the room was Neville's even breathing. As Harry moved closer, it was evident that sleep had eluded his friend for a time. He was sprawled out on the bed, surrounded by several books that appeared to have been looked at, then quickly tossed aside. Harry sighed. He'd have to apologize to him later.

He moved toward his trunk, grabbing a pair of sweatpants and a clean t-shirt, before slipping into the bathroom.

As the steaming water caressed his body, soothing the tension and aches in his joints and muscles, he took the time to muse over the events of the last 24 hours.

The meeting with Albus had begun this crazy chain of events. Well, that meeting was inevitable. It would have happened one way or another, and in truth, it could have gone much worse than it had. Harry knew, beyond a doubt, that there were several loopholes in the oath Albus had taken, and would exploit, if he felt the necessity, but in truth, Harry wasn't all that concerned. After all, he'd tried to dissuade Remus and Sirius from coming at all, and had a say as to the wording of the oath. In short, it covered Harry's major concerns, and held implications, even Albus wasn't fully aware of.

No, the real problems had started with his decision to enter the Chamber. And it wasn't even the fact that he'd been knocked out. That part, honestly, hadn't been that bad. In fact, it only reinforced the conclusion that he had come to years ago that some force in this universe had no desire for him to die. Half the time, he was certain it was a guardian angel. The other half, he was sure it was some demonic force that was determined to prolong his suffering on this mortal plane.

The true problem had been the amount of time he had remained incapacitated, and the fact that Minerva and Albus had 'panicked' in that amount of time, and in turn utterly terrified his uncle and godfather, not to mention Neville.

Then, of course, Albus had considered...only for a moment, but still. Harry had no one to blame but himself; for Albus' assumption as well as Snape's presence. Albus had jumped to the outrageous conclusion that his disappearance was a possible Death Eater plot, then used Snape in an attempt to confirm or deny his suspicions.

Okay, so maybe it wasn't a completely outrageous hypothesis, and if he was real honest with himself, which he wasn't sure he wanted to

be at the moment, if he had been in Albus' position, he would have at least considered the possibility.

The more he thought about it, the less annoyed he became with the old man's assumptions. He hadn't planned on it, but he could see a way to use this to his advantage. An amused glint now shown in his eyes as he stepped out of the shower, and wrapped the towel around his waist. He knew what he had to face in a few hours, but if he played it right...the amusement in his eyes expanded as a small, mischievous smile twitched on the edge of his lips. Ohh, this was going to be so much fun! If it didn't backfire on him.

A drying charm on his hair and a few minutes later, he emerged from the steamy bathroom, feeling clean, refreshed, and calmer than he had in days. He knew that it would be short lived, but for the moment, he simply wanted to bask in the tranquility of the present.

Small beams of sunlight of the early morning were slowly filling the room. As his eyes adjusted, he noticed that Neville was no longer sprawled out on the bed, but awake and sitting Indian style on it, although his eyes still held a heaviness from the lack of sleep.

"You're here." He heard him mutter, as Harry moved towards his own bed, before mumbling something, although the only words Harry caught were 'knew it', 'hiding', and 'was right'

Harry shook his head, hiding his amusement "Hey Nev."

"I told them you were just hiding." He murmured softly

Harry couldn't repress a snicker "Well, I wasn't exactly hiding, but you weren't far off."

Neville reddened slightly, not having meant to be heard "I, uh, I said, but I...didn't mean" Neville moaned "Did I get you in trouble?"

Harry laughed at his friend's uneasiness, although he could tell that Neville found the situation anything but funny, so he calmed down

"I don't think I have any problem getting myself into trouble."

Neville still didn't appear convinced

Harry sighed, jumping up on his bed. He pulled a pillow towards him, lying on his stomach, and facing his friend. He took a good look at Neville for a moment, before continuing.

"Look Nev." He ran his fingers through his hair "Yeah, I'm in some trouble, okay, but it had nothing to do with anything you said or did. In fact, what you said only helped them find me faster."

Neville's face scrunched up "What do you mean?"

"Well, where I went was a place my dad and his friends used to go to...get away from everything."

Neville appeared thoughtful "Is, is that why you won't tell us where it is?" he asked after a moment "Because it's...special?"

Harry smiled a little "That's part of it. It makes me feel, um, closer to my dad, I guess."

"Oh." Neville replied softly, although it seemed like it was in a more understanding tone

Harry sighed again "Listen, it's not that I don't want you there, you, and Ron, and Hermione. You're my best friends. I just, I think I need some time."

Neville nodded "I...I can understand that. I mean"

Harry smiled "How is that going? Your mum and dad, I mean?"

Neville shifted slightly "I, uh, I told them. Ya-you know, what you said I should."

Harry's expression softened "And?"

"Well, they, um, they" Neville shifted uncomfortably

“You did the right thing, Nev.” Harry said gently “That took a great deal of courage.”

Neville reddened, fidgeting slight and looked down at his hands “That’s what they said, too. But, it’s just...they’re angry at Gran right now, and Uncle Algie. He came around once, two days after the announcement, but there was a big fight between him, my aunt, Gran, and mum and dad. He and my aunt, uh, haven’t been back since. Gran’s still around, but speaking terms aren’t exactly the best and I...I think she blames you, uh, Gran that is.” Neville had somehow managed to get that all out in one breath, and now was now gasping slightly

If Neville hadn’t been so evidently shaken by the situation, Harry might have voiced his amusement over the fact that Augusta blamed him for the situation. But as it was, Neville currently needed reassurance now more than anything.

“Do you blame me?” Harry asked softly

Neville appeared so-‘lost’, but after a moment, he slowly shook his head

Harry ran his fingers through his hair thoughtfully “I’m sorry, Nev. I didn’t mean to cause any animosity or additional stress for your family. I can imagine how difficult it is right now. And while I do apologize and accept some of the blame for bringing this...issue to your parent’s attention with everything else they have to deal with. I admit, the timing probably couldn’t have been worse, but” he pursed his lips before completing his thought “well, I don’t apologize for the fact that it was brought to their attention.”

Neville shot him a look that distinctly said he was confused over this declaration, and perhaps even a bit defensive, although uncertain as to the reason why.

“What, uh, I don’t” Neville began, but didn’t appear to know what to ask

Harry gazed at his friend, trying to figure out the best way to explain what he meant. He finally decided on a path.

“Look, Nev” he began “I’m not trying to down play or minimize your parent’s situation. I’m also not saying what I did was right. I’m just saying that as far as the...outcome ” he hesitated, trying to find the right words

In that moment, Neville blurted out a question that had obviously been festering for quite a while “Why did you do it?”

Harry looked up, slightly surprised. That hadn’t been a question Neville had initially posed to him, nor asked him in any of their letters since that day. He wondered exactly how much he should reveal to his friend.

He pursed his lips, before sighing, and leaning into his pillows against the backboard “What do you know about that particular ritual, Nev?”

Neville shifted slightly “I’ve studied it.” He muttered noncommittally

“You had a tutor before Hogwarts, right? Someone who taught you about everything pureblood; rights, rituals, customs, ect. Someone who taught you your supposed place in this society, and the role you’re expected to play?”

Neville bit his lip, but slowly nodded

“Then what did they say about that particular ritual? Not so much ‘how’ it’s performed, but ‘why’.”

“Um.” Neville seemed to be thinking “I think it’s, uh, associated with ‘peace offerings’ or something like that, with the ‘life debt’ and all.”

Harry nodded in approval “Exactly. It’s seen as a peace offering; as a peaceful way to resolve a conflict, should both parties desire it without a duel or, uh, bloodshed.” Harry stated, rolling his eyes as he did. Really, some pureblood customs were completely unnecessary, and utterly outdated “Although, more importantly, it’s seen as

extending a hand of friendship. The life debt is seen as something of a 'gift', I suppose you could say.

"A gift?" Neville questioned

Harry's lips twitched "Okay, not exactly 'gift'. A 'choice' would probably be a better description. The Mercy Pardon is just what its name implies, a chance for the wronged party to offer 'mercy' to the guilty. The 'life debt' is a symbol of justice offered to the offended. The wronged party has to make a conscious decision as to whether they want to seek justice for the misdeed committed against them, or if they're willing to mercifully pardon it, thereby extending a hand of friendship in return."

Neville's face scrunched up "How do you know all that?"

Harry shrugged "I read a lot, and I was reading up on purebloods after I found out my dad was one. Then Uncle Moony and Ms. Karin told me some things afterwards."

Neville still appeared confused "I still don't understand why you did it." He questioned, almost hesitantly

Harry sighed "I could tell your grandmother was angry at Sirius, and I..."

"How?" Neville interjected

Harry mentally groaned, but remained calm "I could always tell when Uncle Vernon was upset at me."

At that, Harry saw some of the fire leave his friend's eyes, as they were instantly lowered, and he couldn't help but feel a bit guilty.

"So you...you did it for your godfather?" he asked, after a moment of uncomfortable silence

Harry couldn't help but let out a small laugh at this.

Neville appeared started, and slightly embarrassed, thinking he had said something stupid.

Harry covered his mouth, and took a moment to regain his composure.

“Neville.” He started “If I had done it just for Sirius, I would have gone a lot further then I did.”

Neville scrunched up his face, obviously confused at the statement “Huh?”

Harry sighed “I wouldn’t have stopped where I had, and I would have never invoked the mercy pardon.”

Neville’s face was still scrunched “I...don’t understand.”

Harry ran his fingers through his hair “Nev, I didn’t do it for Sirius. A lot of people are still skeptical about his innocence. People are going to believe what they want, no matter what I say or do, including your grandmother. I wasn’t trying to change her opinions, merely trying to get her to consider a different train of thought.”

“So you...did it for her?” Neville questioned, thoroughly confused

Harry fiercely shook his head “You’re misunderstanding me, Nev. I didn’t do it for her or for Sirius. I did it for you.”

Neville appeared utterly shocked “What?” came the whispered question

“I did it for you.” Harry stated again, as if it was the most obvious thing in the world “For you. For us. For our friendship, and the future of that friendship.”

Neville still appeared shell-shocked, but he was slowly finding his voice “You...you would risk a life debt for...for...”

“For your friendship?” Harry smiled “That and more.”

Neville had lapsed into silence again, and Harry could tell that he was trying to process everything, and his emotions were haywire

Harry allowed a lapse of silence. Neville couldn't understand how deep their friendship truly ran. It was a truly 'magical bond', and one he had no desire to jeopardize. Neville was truly his 'brother', whether he knew it or not.

After a long moment, Neville finally posed another question, seemingly trying to avoid his discomfort, and hide the redness on his face, a result from the obvious meaning of his friend's words

"You said you didn't re-regret the 'outcome'?" he stuttered out "What did you, uh, mean?"

Harry pursed his lips, before slowly going into his explanation "Nev, I already admitted I was wrong, and I was. This is not something I had the 'right' to bring up. It wasn't my business, and I said it in the heat of the moment. I didn't plan on it, and then I made a rash and...extreme parallel."

"Parallel?" Neville interjected

Harry nodded "I was comparing the way your grandmother was 'wrongly' accusing Sirius for the actions of his cousin to the way someone could accuse your grandmother for the actions of her brother, your great uncle, brought upon you; but it wasn't a completely accurate parallel."

Neville's face was once again scrunched "Why?"

Harry's lips twitched "Mainly this. Sirius had no control or responsibility for his cousin's actions. He was barely out of school, and not the Head of the Black Family at the time. Bellatrix was several years older than him, and a married woman, bound to the LeStrange Family through her marriage. Your grandmother, on the other hand, was not only the Acting Head of the Longbottom Family after your Grandfather died, but she was also your legal guardian, which meant she not only had a 'legal' obligation to protect you, but a moral one as well. The same thing could be said about your uncle,

that he should have had a moral obligation to protect you, simply because you were a child and his family; but...as we both learned the hard way, our families don't always protect us." a slight bitterness had slowly crept into his voice, and he didn't bother to mask it

Neville appeared a bit uncomfortable at this assessment, but a hint of understanding or perhaps 'agreement' flitted across his face

He started to say something, but Harry wasn't finished

"He should have been more worried about whether or not you were growing up happy and healthy, not whether you were showing signs of magic. I mean after..." He stopped short, realizing he was about to reveal something there was no way he could have known

Harry shook his head, silently cursing his carelessness "Look, Nev. This is what I mean. I admit that the timing is horrible. This issue is not something that had to be dealt with immediately, especially so soon after your parent's recovery, well, continuing recovery; but" he paused, forming his words carefully "I don't believe it's a bad thing that they found out. I heard my uncle and godfather talking, and they said that your parents had told them that they saw and heard everything that's happened over the last 10 years. That means that for all those years, they saw you, they knew who you were, even if they weren't able to show or tell you..."

"Mum tried." Neville interjected, although his voice was barely a whisper, his eyes downcast as he twisted his hands

Harry paused, knowing where Neville was going with this

"She would always" Neville started, then fell silent

"Yes." Harry prodded after a moment

"She would, uh"

"You don't have to tell me, if you don't want to." Harry tried to assure him "It's your busi..."

“Gum Wrappers.” Neville blurted out

Harry hid a smile. He knew this was something Neville had never shared with anyone, and something that was very close to his heart

“Okay.” Harry said quietly “What about them?” his tone was completely neutral, holding no hint of sarcasm

“She would, uh, she would always givethemtome.” He stated, running his words together “Ever since I was little, she...Gran would tell me to throw them away, but I-I”

“You couldn’t.” Harry finished gently

“It’s stupid, I know.” His voice was becoming hard “I know it, I...” it was almost as if he were steeling himself to get laughed at

“I didn’t say that, Nev.” Harry interjected “And I don’t think that.”

“But I-it’s” his voice was quickly breaking, losing its composure

“It’s not stupid, and it’s not babyish, or anything else ‘negative’. If my mum could give me anything, I certainly wouldn’t throw it away.”

Neville looked up, his face beat red, partially for not considering Harry’s situation, but more for the fact that he was an 11-year-old dealing with an emotional situation that would be more then taxing on a full grown adult

“See Nev, this is why I don’t think it’s a bad thing they found out. They’re your parents, but for the last 10 years they haven’t been able to be there for you in that capacity. They need that chance, and after visiting them, I’d say they want that chance to be just that-your parents. They want to protect you, and this ‘situation’ is giving them the opportunity. It may not be, well, ‘ideal’, but it is giving them the chance to take an active role in your life.”

Neville hesitated, before speaking “And if I don’t wa-want them too?” the statement was a question in more ways than one, but Harry understood completely

Harry sighed "Nev, you and I are more alike than " He shook his head "I understand where you're coming from. Believe me, I do. The both of us have had very similar lives, yet in different ways. Do you understand 'why' you don't want your parents to interfere?"

Neville bit his lip "I, uh. It's hard to explain. It" he was struggling to find the words, but Harry just waited patiently, knowing they would come

"I-I guess it...it's just...it's not their problem!" He finally managed, somewhat forcefully

Harry sighed heavily, but nodded "That's one of the big ways we're alike; we're both incredibly independent. Perhaps in different ways, but, for both of us, we've come to heavily rely on ourselves. I had to take care of myself. I didn't have anyone. You had your Gran, but...it's not the same thing as having parents, or even someone who's constantly watching you or looking out for you. The both of us are used to dealing with our problems on our own, with little or no assistance from anyone, much less the adults around us. Most of my problems were at home, but when I had a problem at school or something, I obviously couldn't go run to my aunt or uncle with it. They weren't going to scoop me up, and tell me that everything was going to be alright, and to let them handle it. And while I don't think your grandmother was unkind, unless I'm very much mistaken, your grandmother was similar in her response and demeanor, where emotion was concerned."

Neville bit his lip harder, almost to the point of drawing blood, but very slowly, very hesitantly, nodded

"That's why you don't want your parents to interfere, isn't it?"

Neville's eyes shifted "I guess. I never, uh, knew how to say it before. How did "

Harry shrugged "I guess I've been thinking about it for a 'while'. Uncle Moony's trying to take on a parental role, and it's, uh, honestly it's more than a little strange. I'm not used to having someone, I don't

know, offer to help me with my homework or take an interest in my social life. It's just-strange, and going to take some getting used to. I'm guessing it'll be the same thing for you?"

Neville shrugged "Yeah, probably."

"Remember what I said about a neutral third party, someone you can just rant to? I'll never judge you, Nev."

Neville reddened again, obviously not sure how to respond

"Oh, I almost forgot." Harry exclaimed, rolling off his bed, and moving towards his trunk "I've got your Christmas present."

Neville appeared confused "But - you already gave me those books on Herbology."

"Yeah, but I didn't want to send this one by owl." He opened his trunk, pulled out a small package, drew his wand, and muttered an enlarging charm

Neville's eyes grew slightly as the package did

"The store put a shrinking charm on it, and I looked up how to reverse it." He said in way of explanation

He placed the long package on his friend's bed. Neville looked from Harry to the package. "Uh, Thanks." He said softly

"Go on and open it." Harry prodded

Slowly, Neville ripped the wrapping from the package, finally revealing a brand new Lightning Bolt 7Z

Neville's eyes widened in surprise.

"It's the latest model in the Lightning Bolt line. It came out just in time for the Christmas season."

Neville seemed too stunned to speak

"I know flying isn't your favorite thing to do, but I thought you might like a better broom than the ones here at school. If you don't like it, you can take it back and get one you do." Harry assured him

Neville still appeared conflicted in his emotions, but slowly shook his head "No I" he ran his fingers over the smooth wood "It's really nice. It's...I didn't think 1st years were allowed to have brooms?" he asked slowly

Harry smiled, and reached into his trunk again, this time pulling out large, heavy tome, and held it up for Neville to see. It was entitled 'Hogwarts Laws, Rules, and Regulations-Interpretations, Specifics, & Loop Holes Every Student Should Know'

"A gift from my dear godfather. Said it helped him and my dad out of trouble more than once. It was written back in 1732 by a former student and apparently prankster who claims in the book that trouble seemed to follow him, of course, through no fault of his own. It's been updated since then, to incorporate new laws as they've come along. It's really fascinating."

Neville hesitated, but asked "And the rule about brooms?"

"Well, the rule does state that 1st years can't have brooms, but only until they pass their flying test, which was held right before the Christmas holidays. We only have flying lessons the first half of the year, and we all passed our flying test. As I understand it, flying lessons used to be held all year for the first years, and they didn't take their test till the end of the year. Therefore a student wasn't allowed to have their own broom till second year. That's the way it's always been, so no one ever questioned it. Hooch, however, has a different way of doing it."

"So-this isn't breaking any rules?" Neville asked quietly

Harry smiled shaking his head "Not a one; and as I remember it, you passed your flying test spectacularly."

"Only cause you let me practice on yours." Neville muttered

“Hey, don’t sell yourself short, Nev. You’re a good flyer. You just need more, uh, ‘air time’. You’ve got the talent; you just need to discover it for yourself.”

“You think?” Neville asked softly, fingering his broom again

“I’m positive.” Harry stated, reassuringly “In fact, why don’t we go flying this afternoon before everyone gets back. I think I may need a, uh, stress reliever after my meeting this morning anyway.”

Neville looked at him curiously “What do you mean?”

Harry sighed “I’m fairly certain I have a meeting with the Headmaster and Professor McGonagall this morning over last night’s events.” the last word greatly stressed

“Oh, you’re still in trouble? What, I mean, what happened last night.”

Harry ran his fingers through his hair and across his face “I really don’t want to talk about it right now, Nev. It’s still too...Well, let me just see what happens at this meeting, and how much trouble I manage to get myself into by the end of it.”

Neville chuckled a little at that “You think you’re going to get in more trouble?”

Harry shrugged, wearing a mischievous look “Ya never know. I seem to have a knack for it. Now come on, let’s go get breakfast. I’m starving.”

Neville glanced at the clock “But breakfast won’t be served for another hour

Harry shrugged again “Then we’ll go straight to the kitchens. The house elves will give us anything we want.”

“You know how to get in the kitchens?” Neville asked surprised

“Where do you think Fred and George get all the food for our parties after we’ve won at Quidditch?”

At those words Neville got a look on his face as if he remembered something “Are you, uh, are you”

“What?” Harry questioned curiously

Neville hesitated “Are you part of the Golden Vipers?” he blurted out

Harry lips twitched “What would make you think that?” he questioned, amusement dancing in his eyes

“You, uh, at St. Mungos...when your godfather and uncle mentioned the silencing charm and your dad...”

Harry couldn’t hold back a chuckle; thinking quickly, he thought up an excuse “How do you know I wasn’t just thinking of recruiting them to get a little revenge?”

Neville’s face contorted “Well...you’d have to know who they are...” He paused, thinking for a moment “And if you didn’t, you’d have to spend time figuring out who they were...but even then, you’d have to try and convince them to help you...but why go to all that trouble when the Weasley twins are known pranksters, not to mention the best in school, and you’re friends with them, and it wouldn’t make sense unless they were the Golden Vipers, but you hang out with them a lot, and you...”

Neville was rambling and quickly becoming flustered from lack of oxygen. Harry was trying hard to hold back his laughter, but was far from succeeding. It was obvious that Neville had put some thought into this. He’d definitely been hanging around Hermione too much.

“Whoa, Whoa, Whoa, Nev. Slow down.” He laughed, waving his hands in front of him “You’re going a mile a minute and I really don’t want to face Aunt Alice’s wrath when I have to explain just why you keeled over from lack of oxygen.”

Neville blushed slightly, Harry suspected not only as a result of his long-winded rationalization, but also at the reminder that someone other than his Gran would care if something were to happen to him.

Harry suddenly felt a new presence outside the door. He internally smiled, and added

“Besides, then I might have to spill my secret.” He said innocently

Neville looked up, a hint of triumph and knowing in his eyes “You mean...”

“I didn’t say anything.” He smirked “Now come on. I’ll teach you how to break into the kitchen.”

The door suddenly opened “Break into the kitchens, Mr. Potter?”

Harry shrugged innocently at his Head of House “As I understand it, my dad didn’t have a rap of vandalism on his Hogwarts resume ‘till Second year. I thought I’d go ahead and beat that particular record.”

Harry could tell that she was trying to suppress her amusement at the comment through the display of her famous class-silencing scowl. She interjected her own comment

“Actually, Mr. Potter, I don’t believe he committed that particular crime until his third year, and was severely punished for his actions.” She said, as if she was trying to deter him

Harry smirked “You mean the time he vandalized Professor Nikon’s classroom by bringing in muggle fireworks, and charming them to go off every time he said the word ‘detention’, which he did quite often, consequently destroying his favorite chair, broom, ect, although as I understand, he deserved it, being a complete git, and later being revealed as a marked Death Eater.”

All amusement had now left Minerva’s eyes, her lips tight and eyes hard “Mr. Potter, that is not an appropriate topic of conversation and for your guardians to...”

“Professor McGonagall” Harry cut in “It’s a matter of public record, and I’m fascinated with the history of the school, particularly the years of my parent’s attendance. Frankly, it’s the only way I’ll ever get to know them.” Knowing that last comment would at least soften her demeanor towards his supposed ‘curiosity’

As predicted, he felt her emotions shift, and her aura soften, although she maintained her stern outward expression. Harry internally smirked. He wouldn’t expect any less from her.

“But” he continued, switching back to the original point of the conversation “As you said, that was in his third year. I’m referring to the time in his second year when the Transfiguration classroom was turned into a giant litter box then made it change different colors. I don’t think you ever pinned that particular, er, mischief on them.”

McGonagall was now glaring, although not specifically at him “Red, Purple, Silver and Green.” She murmured “Never considered second years...at the time”

Harry chuckled “Actually it was supposed to be Red, Purple, Silver, and Jade, not simply green.”

Minerva’s face contorted “And why would that make a difference, Mr. Potter?” she questioned, after a moment of contemplation

Harry smirked. It amused him that his Head of House was stumped. After a moment, it was obvious he wasn’t going to reveal anything.

“It would still implement Slytherin, or at least appear to, despite the shade intended.”

Harry smirked again “Implementing Slytherin was merely an added bonus. It was hardly their initial intention, and it made sense in the mind of four twelve-year-olds.”

Minerva still appeared confused, and didn’t respond.

Harry looked over at Neville “Nev, do you see the connection?”

Neville appeared confused as well, not to mention extremely hesitant to enter into a casual conversation with a teacher, much less his incredibly stern Head of House.

“Uh, I, not really.” He answered hesitantly “I mean there’s four colors and four-uh-in the group, but...” his voice trailed off

“Four” McGonagall mused, Harry suspected, louder than she meant to “Jade? Jad...James.” She closed her eyes, shaking her head “So simple.” She stated, as if chiding herself “They left a calling card, and no one...”

Harry chuckled “It wasn’t the smartest thing to do, but they were excited that they got away with it.”

“And you’re planning on following in their footsteps?”

Harry smirked “Well...perhaps not quite in the same way, but I do plan on leaving a legacy.” He answered cryptically

Then he shook his head “But I’m sorry professor. You came up here for a reason and, as I understand, I’ve already deprived you of enough of your time today.”

McGonagall’s eyes fell, calculating on her young charge “Your guardians paid me a visit before they left. They said that you requested only my presence today.” While she phrased it as a statement, Harry heard the question behind it

Harry shifted, but spoke in a rational manner “After the...confrontation, I didn’t think it was the best idea to risk another one. They’ve already addressed my living situation. You’re my head of house, and I broke a school rule. Unless it’s extreme, it’s not their responsibility to interfere in inter-school discipline.”

Minerva’s eyebrows were now raised. She was amazed at what she was hearing out of the mouth of an 11-year-old. He sounded so much like an adult. Perhaps he was only repeating what his guardians had said, er, guardian. She couldn’t imagine something like that coming out of Sirius’ mouth.

That thought brought the tiniest smile to her lips, though she quickly hid it

She reverted back to her professional demeanor “While that is a very astute assessment, Mr. Potter, after last night, the Headmaster may have a bit more then...discipline in mind for the topic of this meeting. It would be perfectly acceptable to request some-um-level headed moral support.” She ended neutrally

Harry bit back a smile at her choice of words, but knowing full well what she was referring to “I appreciate the offer, Professor, but I’ll be fine. Besides, you’ll be there. I don’t think the situation will escalate to the point of spiraling into a soul-sucking ‘vortex of doom’.” Harry ended enthusiastically

Minerva’s lips twitched with amusement, and Harry swore he heard Neville stifle a chuckle.

“Quite, Mr. Potter. Very well; if you’re sure, meet me in front of the gargoyle in front of the Headmaster’s office at 10 a.m sharp.”

Harry nodded “Yes Ma’am.”

She turned to leave, then added “Oh, and about the kitchens, should there be any sort of ‘upset’ there is a limited pool as to find the party responsible. I would hate to find out a Gryffindor brought that kind of attention and disgrace to their noble house.”

Her voice was stern, but Harry detected the lack of conviction behind her words

“Of course, Professor.” He answered simply, giving her a small smile

“And, Mr. Longbottom, you may meet me tomorrow in my office at 5 after classes.”

Neville looked up “Thank you, Professor.”

With a final nod, she turned and left the room.

As the door shut, Harry let out a heavy sigh, and collapsed on the bed.

“Well, that was interesting.”

“Yeah. Uh, she didn’t say anything about my broom.”

Harry shrugged “It probably didn’t register seeing as how brooms are common enough here. But if she or any other teacher does say anything, you can just say you’re following rule 162.87 FI of the rules concerning Student Possessions. But hey, what did she mean about meeting her tomorrow?” he asked, rolling over to face his friend

Neville bit his lip “Uh, I’ll be going to spend time with my p-parents in the evenings and on the weekends.”

A genuine smile crossed Harry’s face “That’s great, Nev.”

Neville appeared hesitant “I’ll be gone a lot.” He muttered, almost incoherently, but Harry heard him anyway

“Does that bother you?” Harry questioned

Neville shrugged “I don’t know. Its - different. It’ll make me di-different. I mean, no one else...”

Harry sighed, giving him a look of understanding “Are you worried about what people will think or say? Are you worried about what we’ll say, your friends? Or are you worried about spending so much time with your parents, people you barely know?”

The only answer he received was a noncommittal shrug, but the emotions his friend was emitting told Harry everything he needed to know.

“Nev, it doesn’t matter what anyone else thinks. This is your life, and you have to do what’s right for you. Who cares if some people think it’s strange that you leave, or whatever. Your real friends will stick beside you, no matter what. If they don’t, then they’re not a real friend,

and as far as your parents are concerned-" Harry paused, before continuing "I think time is the only answer there. You're practically strangers, just with a blood connection. Your relationship is going to have to be built from the ground up, and it's not going to happen overnight. Didn't you say, at Christmas, that people were telling you to take it one day at a time?"

Neville slowly nodded

"Well, that's probably the best advice. Use this time to just get to know one another. Tell them about yourself; about your childhood, how you grew up, what you like or don't like. I guarantee that your mum, especially, will want to know every aspect of your life. Get to know them as well. Ask them about when they were in school, what their favorite classes were, about their teachers, friends. Ask them about Quidditch. If I remember correctly, they both played on the school teams at one point or another."

Neville looked up surprised "Really?"

"I think so." Harry clarified "You can tell them how much Quidditch has changed over the years, the different types of brooms. Tell them about school; how good you are at Herbology, about the teachers, or whatever...although I might not mention the incident at Halloween."

Neville reddened a little at the reminder "Yeah, probably not." He muttered

Harry chuckled "We'll tell them one day, once we're grown and have kids of our own; once we can't get in trouble for it. Or better yet, we'll tell our kids, and let them tell the story. I guarantee, our families will never believe them – but if they did, I'm not sure that your mother or my uncle wouldn't hesitate to reprimand us anyway."

"Oh." Neville interjected hesitantly, bridging a question, Harry could tell he really wanted to ask, but wasn't sure how to

"Mum said you could, that is, if you wanted to, you wouldn't have to if you didn't, but..."

Harry chuckled "Slow down, Nev. You're forgetting that whole breathing thing again. Now what did your mum say?"

"She said you could come, uh, with me on a weekend sometime, if you wanted to." He ended, a hint of nervousness in his voice

Harry smiled "I'd love to. I'd have to ask Uncle Moony, but I doubt he'd have a problem with it. I'd love to get to know your parents better."

A look of, almost, relief flitted across Neville's face, another expression Harry understood, but in all good consciousness, couldn't allow

"But, uh, probably not right away."

Neville's face fell a-bit "Why?"

Harry shook his head "Nev, I know this is unnerving, to say the least, maybe even the tiniest bit scary..."

"I'm not scared!" Neville exclaimed, in a voice that said he was trying to convince himself more than anything

Harry shook his head "Well, I am." he replied quietly

Neville looked up, surprise on his face, but didn't interrupt

"Life is hard, Nev, and the unknown can be scary, especially when it concerns the ones we love. Being afraid doesn't mean you're not brave. Like Halloween, you were scared when the troll attacked, right?"

Neville fidgeted, but nodded

"But you stayed; you had the chance to run, but you chose to stay and fight. That's true bravery, Nev; doing what you know to be right, despite personal fear or insecurity. It's okay to be afraid, as long as you don't let the fear rule you or your life."

Neville's eyes were downcast. His demeanor was one of discomfort at the topic of conversation, but his emotions told Harry that he was hitting close to home.

"Look Nev, I will go with you." Neville looked up at this "It just won't be immediately."

Neville's face fell into a mixture of confusion and slight disappointment, but didn't acknowledge other than nodding.

Harry sighed, knowing his friend felt hurt by his declaration so Harry began slowly "I would love nothing more than to spend time with you and your parents, getting to know you all better. You're my friend, your mother is my godmother, and our parents were good friends. I would love to come, but – I won't. It's not my right or my place."

Now Neville appeared confused "What do you mean?" he asked, without really thinking

"It's not my place." Harry repeated gently "Your lives were stolen from you, Neville. Ten years were stolen from all of you; ten years worth of love, togetherness, memories, even fights and arguments; simply being together and unconditionally caring about one another. The true definition of family. You can't get that back. You can't replace those years. All you can do is live in the 'now'."

Harry paused before continuing "You have this chance, Nev; this time. Time to learn how to become a family, and build those relationships. You're their son; you'll always be their son, and they'll always be your parents, no matter what happens in the future. You deserve this chance without interference from anyone."

There was a long moment of silence before Neville spoke "I still don't think I understand."

Harry chuckled lightly "I'd be surprised if you did. Just know this; you'll never lose my friendship, no matter what. Should you need anything, I'll do whatever I can to help, starting with everyone coming back this evening, but – some of it, you're going to have to face alone. Just know that you'll never be alone." Then suddenly changing the

topic “Now come on, I’m starving, and I still have to teach you how to break into the kitchens.”

Neville gave him an incredulous look “Are you serious?”

“Well, I think we’ll forgo the actually vandalism today. The house elves will have enough to deal with today with everyone coming back without dealing with the remnants of a prank as well.”

Neville’s mouth twitched with amusement “You’re a bit mental sometimes, ya know.”

Harry chuckled and gave a slight bow “Why thank you.” He drawled “I work at it.”

Neville snickered a little, the tension of the moment clearly broken.

Three hours later Harry found himself, once again, being led up the very office he’d desperately been trying to avoid, although now, he couldn’t deny that he was a bit excited. If everything went as planned... Er, never mind. Everything never went as planned, not for him. Well, he’d stick as close to the plan as possible.

He mentally steeled himself, erecting his shields along with several other mental defenses, assuring that even if his mind was effectively attacked, the attacker wouldn’t have access to any of his future memories.

Figuratively speaking, his memories were ‘boxed’ up; the ‘box’ consisting of multiple layers of the creator’s own magic. The first measure of protection being the practical aspect of burying the ‘box’ in the deepest recesses of the subconscious, forcing the attacker to not only be exceptionally skilled at the arts of mind magic, but have to hold the ability and power to maintain a prolonged attack in order to even reach that particular depth of the mind.

On the off chance that the ‘unfortunate’ invading individual successfully breached that level, and still held enough power to engage in an attempt to extract the contents of the ‘box’, they would still face the nearly impossible challenge of penetrating the actually

'layers'. While each 'box' was constructed differently, according to the constructor's design, generally the first layer was a mild but powerful pain curse, given as a mere warning to stay away. If that didn't work, and the first layer was infiltrated, the second layer would prove much more powerful and more importantly, painful. It would send a series of fierce shocks throughout the body, along with pulsating angry red boils all over the skin. Then, if you were still glutton for pain...er, determined, the third layer sent a spell paralyzing the body, and...well, you get the idea, and there were a total of 7 layers, that only increased in severity.

This particular defense was a variation of an Angel technique used not only to protect their very identities and the fact that they belonged to the organization, but also used in protecting the contents of Angel meetings and their secrets. And the simple beauty of the ritual was that a memory charm was held within the seventh layer, targeting and completely destroying any and all memories of the attacker had of the attackee, including all of their suspicions of him or her.

Of course, with Harry, no one had ever gotten past the third layer, and Tom had been the only one to succeed in that. Of course, it had only been after two months of continuous torture during his three month captivity that Tom had even discovered the 'box'. By that point, Harry had been so magically exhausted and on the brink of breaking, only then had Tom had been able to delve into the deepest layers of his mind. He then proceeded to use the next month, before Harry was rescued, attempting to break in, yet even with Harry's weakened state, Tom had only managed as far as the third layer.

But enough of that. It all came down to 'no one' was getting through, and he, Harry, was even stronger now than he had been at 24. Immensely more powerful, as a matter of fact.

He fell in behind his Head of House as they entered the office. He wasn't surprised to find that Albus wasn't the only one in the room. In fact, he was counting on this. He needed both of them to be here for his plan to work at all, and so far it was looking good. Of course, no one had opened their mouth yet. There was always that inconvenient little detail when it came to a conversation.

Harry idly wondered what would happen if he tried to conduct this conversation telepathically. The problem with that, that while it involved no verbal communication, it still consisted of thoughts and ideas being sent to another person, which consisted of words. Oh well, so much for that idea.

He found it curious that none of the past Headmasters and Headmistresses were in their portraits. Now that he thought about it, none of them had been there during his earlier conversations either. He knew from experience that the Headmaster had the authority to request that they leave their portraits for a set amount of time, 'within reason', were the rules, as set in the Hogwarts rules. He knew the reason behind this rule had to do with privacy issues, and Harry guessed that was why Albus had invoked it. Of course, it begged to question just 'what' Albus had been up to since, well, if he had to guess, the day after Christmas.

Harry wore a mask of calm and composure as he took a seat next to his Head of House, only briefly meeting Albus' grandfatherly mask, and Snape's darkened scowl, his black eyes filled with loathing and resentment, though, Harry was certain, not entirely at him.

The emotions being emitted from all three teachers was piercing, almost to the point of being painful, but not overwhelming. Harry had become accustomed to dealing with high levels of emotion, since he had come into this power approximately 5 years before he 'died'. Actually, he was surprised he still had this power. Most of the other powers he had acquired at the same time had disappeared when he had 'changed' bodies. It wasn't something he had figured out yet, but had had little time to research or study on. And right now he had bigger problems.

It didn't take more than 30 seconds for the silence to be broken.

"Well, can we get on with this?" huffed Snape "My last few hours of freedom from insolent brats are currently being wasted!"

Minerva merely rolled her eyes at her colleague "Then why are you here, Severus? There's no reason."

Snape scowled “Certainly not by choice.” He stated bluntly

Minerva sighed resignedly, the lack of sleep catching up to her, now that the shot of adrenalin as a result of her concern and anger had receded, leaving only exhaustion and weariness

“Alright, Albus. Why exactly are we here? I know we all have obligations to fulfill before tonight. As Head of Gryffindor, it’s my responsibility to determine an appropriate penalty, seeing as the crime is less than severe.”

Snape snorted at these words, but Minerva ignored him.

Albus adjusted his spectacles, a similar weariness showing on his own face, regarded both of his teachers for a moment, before nodding tiredly “Very well, Minerva. I’ll leave Mr. Potter’s punishment to your discretion.”

“Then we’re done here.” She tried, though she knew they weren’t

Albus paused “Of course, you won’t be kept from your responsibilities. Please feel free to go about your duties.”

Harry mentally shook his head. He had to give the man his props. He could take anything and twist it.

Minerva recognized the technique as well “And Harry?” she questioned pointedly

Harry raised an eyebrow. Her use of his first name was forgoing her professionalism for the moment, and sent a message to all present, specifically Albus. At this moment she was acting as more than simply his Head, but as a friend, a protector, whether it be in lieu of Remus and Sirius, or for own reasons. It reminded him just how many people he had on his side, that cared about him, and ironically, most either hadn’t seen him since he was a baby or very little since then.

“I would like to speak to Mr. Potter for a few minutes. It seems that I have been less than attentive to his – well being.” He appeared to be

choosing his words carefully, slowly, but Harry could tell that he had already planned this out in his mind

Harry internally smirked, before making a comment of his own. Time to mix it up

“Please sir, I don’t fully understand why you believe you need to take such an active role in my personal life?” Harry interjected, before anything else could be said

The adults looked directly at him, surprise etched on all their faces. Well, Snape’s still held a scowl, as if questioning him having the audacity to speak up. Perhaps they hadn’t expected him to say anything, believing him to be scared or intimidated over the fact that he was in trouble for his little disappearing act last night. Well, he would happily change that line of thinking.

Albus appeared not only surprised, but the slightest bit confused at the question, although Harry knew Albus well enough to understand why. It wasn’t even entirely his fault-entirely. Albus’ name and reputation were so widely known and ‘supposedly’ respected throughout the Wizarding World within Great Britain, and certainly throughout much of Europe for his part in WW2 and the defeat of Grindelwald, it was almost expected that he would ‘intervene’ in one way or another in any major event, and that his ‘assistance’ would be welcomed and praised.

For Harry, he considered Albus’ actions ‘negatively interfering’ rather than ‘positively intervening’, and the way he had chosen to ‘interfere’ in Harry’s life, the information Albus had chosen to divulge, or lack there-of, had come very close to being the biggest mistake of the man’s career.

Harry remembered Albus telling him in his original 1st year that knowledge or truth was both a wonderful and terrible thing. While Harry had come to find this statement true, he also found that having availability to the truth, the whole truth or at least as much as was available could mean the difference between life and death.

“What do you mean, my boy?” Albus questioned, serenely

Harry restrained himself from growling, and managed to keep his features calm. He hated the term 'my boy'. The phrase had become second nature to the man, though Harry knew his reasons behind using it, most of which had to do with indirectly reminding people of his as well as their status, and putting them 'in their place', whatever that might be. It was also part of his grandfatherly façade, but, in truth, it was more demeaning than anything.

He calmed himself before continuing, remembering his plan "Forgive me." He began, though this was one person he was not seeking forgiveness from "But I don't understand why you've taken such a personal interest in me. I mean, I'm just another student, but even before that..." he paused, before going on "I've read over my parent's will, and not to be rude sir, but your name's not mentioned anywhere within it. You had no right nor authority to place me with my relatives. In fact, the will specified that that was the one place that I was not supposed to go."

Albus showed no surprise to this, merely a bit of concern at someone questioning him so pointedly

Answering uniformly, though adding a slight hint of a serious note to his tone, he responded "You must understand, my boy that I had to make a difficult decision. They were your only living relatives. It was the safest place for you."

"Why?" Harry questioned bluntly

Albus appeared confused, and the other teachers seemed too taken aback by the impending byplay to contribute their own thoughts

"Why 'what', my boy?" Albus question after a moment of rare perplexity

"Why did you have to make that decision? Why did you think it was the safest place? You had no right and there was no need. My parent's wishes were clearly stated. Sirius should have taken me in immediately."

Albus stroked his beard “I’m afraid that, at the time, Mr. Black was believed to have...”

“But it wasn’t proven.” Harry interjected, cutting him off “Neither you nor anyone else had any proof other than word of mouth, that he was guilty of anything. Propaganda and misdirection are key components in any war, both – muggle and magical alike. Surely, having lived through more than three wars yourself, sir, you understand this.”

Harry hoped that by throwing in the muggle comment, they would overlook his use of the more advanced terminology, and just believe that it was something he had heard or read. Unfortunately, this wasn’t to be.

“That’s quite a – vocabulary, Mr. Potter. May I ask where you inquired such an insight?” Albus’ voice was steady, but laced with concern

Harry shrugged, portraying an innocent air “I like to read, sir, and history fascinates me. But I’m still unclear. I should have immediately gone to Sirius the night Hagrid came to fetch me.”

Albus appeared thoughtful, hiding the anxiety his aura was emitting “As I said, Mr. Black...”

“Wasn’t even accused of anything until three days later.” Harry said, cutting him off again “When he cornered Pettigrew on the street.” He wanted to smile. This was fun. But he restrained himself “Then Pettigrew framed him for his own crime.”

Albus stroked his beard again, always a sign of his anxiety, and was silent for a moment. Harry took this brief second to indirectly glance at the other individuals in the room. McGonagall was watching all of this, stern faced, but with a hint of longing, as if her desire for knowledge outweighed the idea that she was supposed to intervene, and attempt to diffuse a potentially explosive situation.

Snape, on the other hand, was scowling. He appeared, almost, unsure of what to say, yet a bit perturbed at being left out of the conversation. There was a yearning for knowledge there as well, though unlike Minerva, his interests were more self-serving.

Knowledge was power, and power over Albus was something the man desperately lacked and desired.

“If you’ve heard the stories, Mr. Potter, then you must understand how it appeared...”

“Once again, Professor, ‘misdirection’.” Successfully cutting off the man again, for the third time. He idly wondered if that was some sort of a record, but chose not to dwell on it “For whatever reason, no one even considered that Peter Pettigrew could have been guilty and trying to save his own skin. Sirius didn’t even carry the Dark Mark! But, even at that, after Sirius was arrested, and even if he wasn’t given a trial, five minutes of yours or the Ministries time, and three drops of Vertiserum would have proven him innocent of all charges, instead of being locked up in a hellhole for 10 years!” The bitterness slowly creeping back into Harry’s voice

Albus now appeared gravely concerned, and Severus didn’t appear much better. At Harry’s mention of the word ‘Dark Mark’ Severus’ hand had subconsciously touched his own.

“Mr. Potter, the circumstances back then. You can’t understand how...”

“No, you don’t understand!” Harry interjected forcefully, startling the other occupants with his tone “While Sirius was living in a hellhole, I was too! You placed me there. You just left me there, against my parent’s wishes, then you didn’t even bother to check up on me, just like you didn’t bother to make sure Sirius was actually guilty!” Harry voice was angry, even though he wasn’t quite as furious as he was acting. He was upset, the injustice of it all coming back in a fresh wave, but he’d come to terms with much of the hardships of his early life. The birth of his children had helped immensely, though their deaths had nearly destroyed him. It was only in the last five years that...His thought were interrupted by

“Mr. Potter!” McGonagall reprimanded sharply “That’s quite enough!” her tone was biting, but her expression told another story. Her face was pale, and guilt lines crossed her features.

He guessed this was hitting a bit too close to home, just like the articles at Christmas. He hated making her feel guilty. She hadn't checked on him either, but she had been following Albus' orders, as well as trusting his judgment. His plan wasn't to make her guilt-ridden. He knew everything wouldn't go as planned, but it hadn't gone completely array. He still had a point to make, mostly for Albus, though not fully exclusive.

Harry maintained his hardened expression "I'm sorry, Professor, but it's not. I wasn't truly an orphan, 'till Professor Dumbledore made me that way." He snapped, ignoring the noises of disbelief coming from the other two teacher, and glaring at Albus " by deliberately ignoring my parents wishes. I had people that loved me here. I was never loved at the Dursley's. They hated me! It was only the knowledge that I knew I could escape into the Wizarding world one day that often kept me going!"

There was an outcry from both Minerva and Severus, the transfiguration teacher attempting to lecture him again on his outburst, and Snape indigently shaking a finger towards Harry, and half yelling at Albus 'told you so' 'rude' 'impudent' and 'audacious behavior'

Albus allowed it to continue for a moment, before holding a hand up for silence, which came reluctantly after a few more gestures from him. Albus appeared grave, and allowed the silence to penetrate the room before speaking.

"I'm truly sorry, Harry." He said gravely, though interestingly reverting back to first names "I take it your aunt told you the truth, then?" Albus questioned softly, his true age beginning to show

Harry wanted to smirk. This was exactly the lead-in he needed, but he continued to appear angry.

"Of course not!" Harry spat "They lied to me my whole life! Told me my dad was a drunk and my mum was a whore! Said they died in a car crash cause of my dad's drinking! Told me I got this blasted scar in that crash! Said I should have died with them! Most of those times I wish I had! It wasn't till I was six that I knew it was all a lie!"

He folded his arms across his chest, and slumped back in the plush arm chair, still scowling. The silence was ringing. No one seemed to know how to respond. He found Snape's sudden onslaught of emotions the most interesting. He went from being annoyed to viscously furious! He knew it had to be the way Lily had been referred to.

Harry maintained eye contact, hoping Albus would take the bait. Within the ticking silence, he didn't have long to wait. Albus' eyes were weary, but the current dull blue suddenly seemed to bore into Harry's flashing emeralds. Harry never faltered as he felt the first push of Legilemetry. It was stronger than the last time he had been in Albus' presence. He counted 25 seconds, before he THREW up his shields, violently throwing Albus out. It had been so harsh, Albus actually appeared slightly dazed. He shook his head, before looking at Harry, eyes wide, and slightly fearful.

"Stay OUT of my head, Professor!" Harry snapped "I don't like people in my head!"

There was a stunned moment again, before McGonagall finally found her voice

"What are you talking about, Mr. Potter?" McGonagall thoroughly distraught by this point

Harry could have smirked "Professor Dumbledore" he indicated "He tried to get into my head! Professor Snape tries too." Sending an accusing glare towards the Potions master, while using his best 'accusing child's voice' "I don't like it! It hurts! It always hurts!" he deliberately brought two tears to his eyes, before turning his head away, dramatically using his sleeve to wipe them away. Hey, Albus wasn't the only one who could use emotions to turn the situation to his favor.

He swore he saw Snape roll his eyes at his antics, but was quickly cut off at Minerva's loud screech of outrage, obviously realizing the meaning behind Harry's words. She was still in her lecture mode, only now she turned it furiously on the two 'adults' in the room. He sat back, maintaining his hurt expression, and just listened to her rant.

He heard phrases like 'ALBUS, How could you!' 'innocent student' 'Severus, you should know better!' and 'Should report this to the board of governors!'

It seemed she would never run out of breath, and the two men appeared cowed by her words, or perhaps it was just the fact that they had been found out. It seemed evident to Harry that Snape hadn't informed Albus of his attempts to break into his mind, nor the fact that he had stronger shields than the man, himself. Of course, being outdone by an 11-year-old wasn't really something to brag about. But not to inform his 'master'; Harry was shocked!...okay, not really, but he knew Snape would get an ear full of calm, manipulative reprimanding and instruction of how he was supposed to inform Albus of anything and everything significant that he found out about the 'Boy-Who-Lived', all the while reminding him just why he wasn't in Azkaban at the moment, and the only way he could stay out of it.

That was one reason he hadn't tried to plant evidence with Albus or sought his assistance in freeing Sirius. No matter how innocent he was, he would have tried to hold it over Sirius' head that he played a part in freeing him, especially if Sirius had still gotten custody of Harry. More likely, he would have attempted to keep Harry at the Dursley's, and kept Sirius, not to mention Remus, at a minimum in his life, just like he had done the first time around.

Minerva's gumption had yet to abate as she started to repeat her outrage, as if still trying to wrap her mind around the idea.

"What in Merlin's name were the two of you thinking?! Using Legilimency on a student! Have you gone completely mental?! I should report this to the board of governors immediately!"

Minerva continued ranting for a minute, before she demanded "Well, do either of you have anything in the way of an explanation, or Merlin forbid, an apology."

"I am sorry, Minerva..." Albus began

"Not to ME!" Minerva snapped, crossing her arms across her chest

Albus sighed heavily "I...do apologize, Mr. Potter, for my rash action. I assure I meant you no harm."

"What did you mean, Albus?"

Albus fingered his half-moon spectacles "I was merely trying to further understand the events Mr. Potter was describing."

"Then ask me, Professor." Harry interjected "Don't hurt me." Harry turned on his wide-eyed innocent look, mixed with a hint of fear, though he couldn't completely hide his strength. It was too much a part of him.

Albus looked on with great concern "My intentions were far from malicious, Mr. Potter. Perhaps you could...elaborate as to the source of your anguish."

Harry wanted to roll his eyes at Albus' terminology "It hurts, Professor. It just hurts." He said, only a slight moan to his words

"Your head?"

Harry nodded, his eyes squinted slightly "Whenever someone tries to get in it. My scar, too."

"This has happened before?" Albus asked, the concern growing in his eyes

Harry pointed an accusing finger at Snape, who simply scowled in return.

"Ah, aside from Professor Snape; have there been any other...incidents, instances when this has happened?"

Harry deliberately bit his lip and averted his eyes. It worked.

"Wh...when I was little." He said quietly "It always hurt. He would always hurt me."

Albus' eyes narrowed "'He', Harry? Who are you referring to?"

“Tom Riddle.” He said calmly, with only the slightest bite to his words, though he deliberately hardened his gaze

He’d never seen Albus pale as quickly as he did at those two little words

“What?” came Albus’ voice, though it was barely above a whisper

The other two teachers just seemed to be staring, not quite sure what was going on

Albus shook his head as if trying to clear it “Mr. Potter, what name did you say?”

Harry gave him a look of wide-eyed innocence “Tom Riddle.”

If possible, Albus paled even further “You’ve...met Tom Riddle?”

Harry scrunched up his face “Of course not.” Harry bit out, as if it were the most obvious thing in the world “Just talked to him, you know, in my head.”

At this, a scoff came from Snape “Obviously, the boy is delusional, Headmaster. Having an imaginary friend at his age.”

Harry wanted to smirk. Obviously, Snape didn’t have the first clue as to his other Master’s actual identity. He maintained his wide-eyed innocence. He turned on the man, his eyes only slightly hardened.

“I am not delusional.” He snapped, as if he were an upset child “And he’s not an imaginary anything. He’s real. He’s horrible, but he’s real. And besides, I don’t talk to him anymore. Well, I guess I don’t let him talk to me anymore. I hate him!”

A smirk seemed to cross Severus’ face “So Potter, even your imaginary friends can’t stand you; Is that it?”

“Severus!” Minerva reprimanded “That was completely uncalled for.”

“He’s not imaginary!” Harry retorted “And he’d talk to me if I’d let him. I just don’t let him.”

Severus scoffed “Headmaster, clearly...”

“Not now, Severus.” Albus interjected cutting him off, a deep fear etched on his face “Mr. Potter, exactly how long have you been talking to, uh, Tom?” his voice was uncharacteristically shaky, and seemed to dread the answer

Harry shrugged “I don’t know. Since I was little. At first I thought they were just nightmares. Then I thought I was going crazy.” He heard a cough towards Severus’ direction, but ignored it “But then the dreams became clearer, more – real, and then he started talking to me. He tried to be my friend...at first.” Harry added a bitter emphasis on the last two words, cutting into his calm manner

Albus’ voice still shook slightly, though he seemed to have regained at least a bit of his composure. The normally bright twinkle in his eyes had yet to make an appearance this conversation, and if Harry had his way, it wouldn’t rear it’s annoying, er, never mind.

“And what did – Tom tell you?” Albus asked, once again, as if afraid of the answer

Harry pretended to appear confused “About what, sir?”

Albus shifted uncomfortably, something exceedingly out of character for the normally in-control Headmaster “He’s the one that told you about the Wizarding world.” It was more of a statement, Albus coming to his own conclusions, though Harry treated it as a question

He nodded “Yes sir. He first told me I was a wizard. I didn’t believe him, so he told me some of the things I could do with magic, like levitate stuff, and summon things. It was cool, but I didn’t like it when he came.”

“Why was that?” Albus asked

“Albus?” Minerva tried to interject, a confused look on her face

Albus held up a hand to silence her “Mr. Potter.” He prodded

A pained expression crossed Harry’s features “I told you, Professor; it hurt. My head would ache; my scar would burn. Though I think it hurt him also.”

The tiniest flicker of hope flashed across Albus’ face as he asked “What would make you say that?”

Harry shrugged “I guess I know it did. He could never stay very long, but he would come a lot. At first, he tried being my friend. He wanted me to do something for him. He always talked about coming back, regaining power. But, I mean, he was a ghost. I never really understood what he wanted me to do. I was just a kid but he would get angry when I would tell him that I didn’t want him to come anymore, and he would only hurt me worse.” Harry had allowed his voice to show a hint of fear, and had issued a slight shudder when he had mentioned the pain. He needed this to be believable, at least to Albus.

He noted that the other teachers still held looks of confusion, but also perhaps the beginning of an inkling of subconscious understanding.

“And what would you do to make it stop?” Albus ‘appeared’ in control again, but Harry knew better

Harry shook his head “I couldn’t at first; but then I...” his voice faltered

“Please continue, Mr. Potter.” The urgency could be heard in Albus’ voice

Harry shifted nervously, playing up the drama “Then I, uh. Well, one day, I was 6 at the time. I remember, ‘cause I’d just started Mrs. William’s class. She was my Second Year teacher.” Albus appeared slightly irate at this sidebar of information, but maintained his cool expression, so Harry continued

“Anyway, I was 6. He came to me one night. He was angrier than usual. I don’t know why. He never told me, but it...it hurt so much that, that...” his voice was shaky now, and he turned his face away

“Albus, obviously this is upsetting the boy. I don’t understand what’s going on, but surely it’s not important enough to become distressed over.”

Albus appeared weary “I’m afraid, Minerva, that I need to hear Mr. Potter out on this one. Mr. Potter, can you tell us what happened next?”

Harry bit his lip, but looked up “I, uh, it hurt so much that I, I didn’t mean to, but I tried to push him away, push him out. It didn’t work very well, so I told him I wanted him to go away, and never come back. That made him e...even madder.” His voice was deliberately shaky now, but he didn’t have to fake tears as he said the next part “He told me I was w-weak, and that he would kill me, ju-just like he killed my-my parents.” He didn’t hold back the two tears that slid down his cheeks as he said this, allowing the memory of his parent’s murder to come to the forefront of his mind

At these words, the other two teachers paled, nearly as much as Albus had minutes ago. Harry ignored the gasp from Minerva, and continued

“I...I told him he was a liar, and that my parents had died in a car crash. He just l...laughed. It was so cold.” He shivered slightly at these words “He said that I was the one that had been lied to, and he – he proved it. He showed me the night of my p-parents murder. He said it had been easy, and that if I didn’t help him now, that he would kill me later.” The tears were flowing freely now, and he had no problem playing this up

His face and voice became hard, though the tears still flowed “But I didn’t care. I hated him! I hated him after that, and I wanted him to leave me alone! I told him to leave again, but he wouldn’t. I knew then that I had to make him. It took me a long time. I was almost 8 before I could do it the right way; before I could keep him out completely. He came back during that time, but I would just tell him to leave me alone,

and try to block him. I was finally able to keep him out. After that, anytime he would try to come, I would just block him. I hate him!" he ended forcefully

With that, he fell silent, and just stared at Albus, his arms folded across his chest, and not bothering to wipe away his tears, leaving his cheeks streaked and red.

The teachers seemed stunned into silence. Minerva still appeared slightly confused, but more horror stricken than anything. Severus appeared dazed, as if unsure of what to make of the words he was hearing. It was as if he was hearing them, but not comprehending.

Albus, on the other hand, didn't have this problem. He was hearing and comprehending just fine, though he still appeared disbelieving. Not skeptical, per se; his emotions told Harry that he had swallowed it hook, line, and sinker. It was more like he couldn't believe that it had happened under his very nose, or happened with the protections on the house

Albus was the first one to speak "Mr." His voice significantly wavered; he took a deep breath "Mr. Potter, did you ever tell anyone about this?"

Harry felt like groaning and calling the man an imbecile. Who the hell was he supposed to have told? His younger self had had no one in his life 'till 5 months ago, and if in his original timeline, still wouldn't have had anyone at this point.

"I, uh, I tried telling my aunt once, but as soon as she heard it had to do with my mother, she told me to 'shut up' and never mention her 'blasted sister' again." A few fresh tears came to his eyes as he said these words, and he added "I never understood why she hated my mum or me so much."

Albus ignored the comment, more concerned with the bigger 'issue' "Mr. Potter, have you, that is, how often do you talk to Tom?"

Harry rolled his eyes "I told you, Professor. I block him out. I don't talk to him."

Albus appeared to concentrate for a moment “But you said that he ‘would talk to you if you let him’. That would indicated contact in some capacity.”

Harry internally smirked. He had hoped Albus would catch that.

“Well yeah.” Harry admitted, cocking his head “He does try from time to time, but now that I can block him, I just ignore him.”

Albus appeared slightly flabbergasted at how easily Harry was talking about ‘ignoring’ the Dark Lord, spirit or not.

“How often does he ‘try’?” Albus posed

Harry shook his head “Hardly at all. He knows he can’t get in.”

“This year?” Albus pressed

“Uh, just twice. Once right after I started school, then again at the Christmas Holidays.”

This made Severus’ ears perk up and a look of fear cross his face. Not surprisingly a look of fear crossed Albus’ own face. Minerva, obviously out of the loop still appeared perplexed at everything she was hearing.

“And what did he tell you?” Albus asked, attempting to remain calm

Harry wanted to bury his head in his hands in frustration. Was this man completely dense? Had he been listening to anything he had been saying for the last 20 minutes?

Harry sighed “I told you professor, I don’t talk to him. I mean, sometimes I hear bits and pieces of things he’s saying, and a lot of times I feel his emotions, even if he’s not trying to contact me, but that’s it. I block him out before he can try to do, well, whatever he’d like to do.”

A new spark of interest was now on the old man's face, though it still held a definite fear "You – feel his emotions?" Albus questioned

Harry simply nodded

"Without him contacting you?"

Harry nodded again "Yeah, but usually only with really strong emotions. You know, really happy, or excited, or angry; even with my 'blocking powers' it doesn't completely keep his emotions out."

Despite himself and his awareness of the gravity of the situation, or at least what he believed it to be, he raised something of an amused eyebrow "Blocking Powers, Mr. Potter."

Harry shrugged, indifferently "I didn't really know what to call what I did. It sounded good when I was 7."

Albus paused, before returning to the situation at hand "Quite" he said simply "And what – type of emotions did you feel at Christmas?"

Harry contorted his face "Why?" he asked, pretending to appear confused

"Please, Mr. Potter. This is very important." The signs of desperation were beginning to show in his voice

"Albus, what in Merlin's name..." Minerva began

Albus held up a hand "Minerva, not..." he shook his head slowly "Mr. Potter, please. I must know."

"Why?" Harry questioned again, irritatingly. Hey, being a kid did have its advantages

He felt more than saw the feelings of frustration his Headmaster was portraying, and decided to stop evading

"I mean, he was happy, but why would you need to know that?"

Albus paled again “Happy?”

“Yeah, I guess. He was really excited about something, though I don’t know what, and frankly I’m okay with that. He can go f-- himself for all I care.” He huffed

“Mr. Potter!” McGonagall cried “That is far from appropriate language!” she reprimanded sharply “5 points from Gryffindor, and much more if I hear any more of that.”

Harry didn’t respond, but merely slumped back in his seat, internally smirking. It would have been worth a lot more than that just for the look he saw on Albus’ face.

Albus appeared as if he’d just swallowed one of those blasted lemon drops. He seemed as ‘lost’ and confused as his other two teachers, yet it was evident that his mind was working a mile a minute

“Mr. Potter” he finally began “In the future, it would be wise to consider alternative terminology in the expression of your opinions; particularly when the grasp of whom you’re dealing with is not quite within your reach.”

It was phrased cryptically, perhaps even as a test, perhaps not, but Harry knew he had to bite.

Harry scoffed, his eyes becoming cold again “How could I not be aware of who I’m dealing with Professor?! Do you really believe that after he became angry with me, after he stopped pretending to be my friend that he would still tell me his name was Tom Riddle, want me to call him that freely?! No, Professor. I know exactly whom I’m dealing with!”

Albus had shrunk back again “Mr. Potter, I don’t think yo...”

“I do, Professor!” Harry snapped “I know who I’m dealing with! He only told me who and what he was for two years! He only tried to convince me to worship him, to fear his name! He said that those who didn’t already fear his name, soon would! He said that those who still openly spoke his name would soon pay for it with their lives! So don’t

tell me I don't know who I'm dealing with! I know I'm dealing with the Dark Lord! I know I'm dealing with VOLDEMORT! I know I'm dealing with the man who murdered my parents! I KNOW!"

"I know what he wants with me, Professor! At first, he wanted me to help him, join him! But ever since I refused, and made it clear that I wanted nothing to do with him, he's made it perfectly clear that he wants me dead! FINE! Let him try! I'll NEVER help or worship him! I'll never bow down to him!"

"He showed me how he murdered my parents! I can still hear my father's voice as he yells at my mother to take me and run while he tries to hold them off! I hear his final cry as he dies from a cutting spell that slashed across his throat! I see my mother as he cornered her; the fear in her eyes; the terror in her voice as she pleads for my life – not her life, but mine! I see her as she writhes under the cruciatus, still pleading for my life! Then the flash of green light as she falls! It's my fault they're dead! It's my fault he came after us! But he's their murderer!"

Harry took a few 'seething' breaths before continuing. No one else even attempted to speak. Harry suddenly realized that he was on his feet, though he couldn't quite remember when he had risen

"I know who he is Professor! I know how cruel Voldemort can be!" He wasn't shouting anymore, but his voice still held strong and hard "He showed me exactly what he did to those that crossed him! Not just my parents." Harry saw a new fear creep into Albus' eyes as he said this "He's sworn to come after me one day! He's sworn to kill me! All because I wouldn't follow him! Well, I never will! I'll be like my parents, Professor. I will fight against him, and if he ever comes after me, I won't just let him kill me! I won't just let him win!"

He still wasn't shouting or screaming, but his breathing was heavy, and in sharp intakes, and he was still on his feet. He wasn't sure what to do next. He hadn't meant to take it this far, but he knew that if he had been any vaguer, the repercussion would have possibly been worse than they already would be. He didn't know what to do, and it felt as if the walls were closing in.

It had been 15 seconds, and still no one spoke. He felt every eye in the room boring down upon him, but he was afraid of what might happen if he attempted to look any one of them in the eye. He felt as if the walls were starting to close in around him. He didn't know the right thing to do, so he did the only thing that came to mind. Without so much as a backwards glance, he turned on his heel, and fled out the door.

The room was deathly still for several minutes. No one even flinched as the door opened, then shut loudly. No one tried to stop the child as he ran from the room. The remnants of raw power lingered in the air, though not nearly as much if Harry had completely lost his temper. The two teachers seemed frozen in fear, and Albus appeared shaken to the core.

Surprisingly, it was McGonagall to find her voice first, or at least a sliver of it. It was shaky, and her words came out in quivering gasps "M-Mr. Pott...he...he didn...he doesn't mea... Albus?" the single word was filled with pleading, desperation; the hope of a verbal confirmation to tell her that this was all a big hoax

Albus closed his eyes as he put a hand over his face, his head hung slightly.

A sharp intake of breath came from McGonagall.

Severus seemed to have a hard time forming his own thoughts, though his voice was much steadier than the Transfiguration teachers'

"Headmaster, are" he swallowed, though it appeared reluctantly "You're saying that the 'boy' and the D-Dark Lord" he grimaced slightly as he tentatively said the name

Albus sighed heavily, the weariness of the last 24 hours finally being revealed "It would appear that Voldemort" Severus flinched at the name, but Albus continued "did indeed form a connection with Mr. Potter all those years ago. I was afraid..." he shook his head resignedly

“You knew something like this would happen?!” suddenly Minerva had found her voice again, complete with the stern and the sharpness

Albus sighed again “I assure you, I had no idea this was happening. I merely suspected that Mr. Potter’s scar was more than it appeared. I can see now that it was great deal more than even I suspected.”

Minerva’s eyes narrowed “And what makes you believe this is more than just – well, nightmares. I mean, he was young, but trauma can...”

Albus shook his head “I’m afraid this is much more than merely trauma. I truly wish that’s all it was.”

“But what makes you certain it’s not?” she demanded “I mean V-You-Know-Who is supposed to be dead.”

Albus passed a disheartened gaze over his teachers. While Minerva’s sharpness was back, she still appeared shaken, while Severus now wore an impassive look, successful only with his years of practice and powerful Occumency talents.

“I never held to that belief, Minerva. You know that.”

“But you – you couldn’t be certain.” Her voice was becoming desperate again “He’s been gone for...”

Albus ran his hands across his face in obvious conflict “I had hoped that this could wait.” He muttered quietly

After a long moment he looked up, sorrow and regret filling his eyes, unknowing that he, the great Albus Dumbledore, had fallen perfectly into an elaborate scheme laid out by one masquerading as an 11-year-old.

“I’m afraid that it’s time. Minerva, there’s something...”

Harry didn’t allow himself to stop. His breathing was heavy, but it was more out of panic rather than being out of breath. He couldn’t believe he had lost it like that. Sure, he had sent the message he had

intended, just not quite the way he'd intended. He hadn't meant to lose his temper. His plan had been to conduct the entire meeting in a calm, unconcerned manner, subtly dropping the name 'Tom Riddle', hinting at the 'scar connection', and somehow mentioning Christmas.

Well, he couldn't say he hadn't done that, he'd added just a little bit to the story. Now he'd just have to see if his plan went through. He knew that Albus had taken the initial bait – the man's emotions had told him that much. Now he'd just have to wait and see if Albus would do even half of what he predicted. If the lack of portraits on the walls were any indication, he knew he was already up to something.

Coming out of his thoughts, he finally observed his surroundings. He found himself on the 1st floor at the doors to the Great Hall. He sighed heavily, leaning against the stone wall.

He closed his eyes, sensing. Well, no one was coming after him – yet. Though he couldn't imagine how awkward it would be with Minerva. He hadn't meant to pull her into this, not yet, though he guessed she would have been in the thick of it soon enough anyway.

And Severus – the best he could hope for with him is that the man would be a bit fearful of him for a while. I mean, his old master, who he now 'knew' was very much alive, and trying to regain power, which he 'technically' was; had some sort of access to one of his students minds, and indirectly, to him.

Albus would be along the same lines. The best Harry could hope for there was that Albus would fear him, or at least fear what might happen. Honestly, he hoped it would be a repeat of his 5th year (minus Sirius dying of course and undoubtedly minus that horrid witch Umbridge), but the same in the respect that Albus would avoid him at all costs, in the fear of exposing his mind, memories, and secrets to Harry, well Tom.

He closed his eyes again. Still no one chasing him, but...

"Harry, there you are." Exclaimed a voice "Meeting over?"

Harry let out a small sigh "Hey Nev. Yeah it's over. What are you doing?"

Neville shrugged "Nothin' really. Just hanging out." Neville squinted his eyes "Merlin, you look awful."

Harry rolled his eyes "Thanks mate." He replied sarcastically

Neville bit his lip, slipping back into his role of the quiet, submissive child "I, uh, I just meant that you, uh, looked u-upset." He said, with only a slight stutter

Harry's face softened "I'm sorry, Nev. You're right, I probably do look awful. You could say that it wasn't the best meeting in the world." He sighed "Oh, and I think I think I broke my promise to Professor McGonagall about not having it turn into a soul sucking vortex of doom." He added as an afterthought

He emitted a small chuckle at this; the irony of the statement not lost on him

Neville's eyes widened slightly with curiosity "It went that bad?" he asked

Harry shook his head "Not necessarily bad, it just, well, let's just say that it may be awkward for a while."

Neville was still curious "With who?"

Harry smirked a little "You'll see. It won't be too hard to figure out."

It was obvious that Neville still had questions, but being a pureblood, raised in manners and protocol, he had enough tact to drop the subject for the time being.

He shuffled his feet a bit "So, uh, what do you want to do now?" he asked tentatively

A bigger smirk crossed Harry's face though he quickly masked it. He knew what Neville wanted.

He now wore a neutral expression “Oh, I don’t know. I thought I might go finish some homework, or something.”

Neville’s head jerked slightly, a startled look on his face “O-oh, oh. Ok. I guess I’ll just...”

Harry chuckled “I’m just messing with you Nev. I am ready to fly more than anything.”

This brought a smile to Neville’s lips, and his eyes were alight with a joy, Harry might even go as far to say ‘peace’ that had never been present in him before. And it was certainly more than just the flying. It was, well, everything. There were some hardships mixed in, true, but that was just a part of life. His old friend had never had a lot in his life to be ‘happy’ about. He deserved this chance.

“Have you eaten lunch yet?” Harry found himself asking

“Uh, actually, I got these.” He said, pulling several items wrapped in brown paper out of his robe pockets “After you left the kitchens, the house elves kept trying to feed me. I finally asked if I could have some sandwiches to take with me. They tried to give me a four course dinner.”

Harry laughed “Yeah, they tend to do that. If you think that’s going to be enough, we can skip the Great Hall, and go ahead and change and grab our brooms.”

Neville pulled out two more packages and a piece of fruit “These pockets are magically expanded. They just kept giving and giving. I’ve got enough food to feed an army in here.”

Harry’s eyebrows quirked “Or at least Ron.” He quipped

Neville snorted amusedly

Relaxed for the moment, Harry made a gesture towards the stairs, and the two friends began climbing, laughing and conversing about

the simple topics of life, unconcerned with the conversation that was taking place just a few floors above their head.

“You can’t be serious Albus?!” Minerva screeched, who was now frantically pacing the floor

“I truly wish this could be delayed, Minerva.” Albus sighed heavily “However, I’m afraid the time has come. We must be prepared.”

“But Albus the...the evidence is sketchy at best. Surely...” her voice was pleading, as she ran her finger through the edges of her hair.

“You saw the Mark, Minerva.”

“So you think it’s gotten a shade darker! There’s no way that to know everything about that – that thing! There’s no telling...”

“I know about this!” Severus snapped, a sharp scowl on his face “You believe I would make this up?!”

Minerva shrunk back slightly, clearly disturbed by this whole conversation “I don’t think – that is, I wasn’t implying” she growled in frustration “You can’t be sure, Severus, and there’s no need to create unnecessary fear and panic on a suspicion!”

“It’s better to be prepared then to be caught off guard. I would rather have preparations in place then be caught unaware. We knew this day would come.” Albus’ voice was back to its calm diplomatic manner

“You believed, Albus!” Minerva retorted “We didn’t know!”

Albus sighed heavily, hanging his head slightly “I wish that were true. However” he pursed his lips “I’ve spoken to Alastor. He agrees that we shouldn’t wait.”

“Of Course, he agrees!” Minerva bit out “The man’s completely paranoid! He would agree to any plan of attack. There’s still no evidence that...”

“What about the evidence Mr. Potter presented?” Albus asked calmly

Minerva’s eyes flashed “What about it, Albus?” she snapped “He’s just a child! He has nothing to do with this!”

“On the contrary, Minerva. I’m afraid Mr. Potter is very much involved. More so than I would have thought.” There was a sadness in Albus’ voice, though a knowing there as well

“Then you need to take it up with Remus and Sirius.” Minerva retorted

At this, Albus appeared adamant “I’m not sure that’s the best course of action at the present time.”

Minerva’s eyes flashed again “They’re his guardians, Albus! They have a right to know – whether or not this is all true. There’s obviously something disturbing the boy, and he needs help to deal with it. Personally, I think it’s a result of the abuse he suffered at the hand of those horrid relatives you chose to place him with!” her breathing was heavy, and a scowl dominated her face, her arms folded tightly across her chest

Albus hung his head “I have apologized for that, Minerva. It truly was the safest place at the time.”

“I’ll say it again, Albus. You need to redefine your version of the word ‘safe’!”

Albus’ eyes showed the first hint of frustration though his speech remained calm and placid “I understand, Minerva, but I still believe that something’s going to happen. We must prepare.”

Minerva threw up her hands “Fine, Albus. Fine. But for the record, I am completely against this! And if you try to involve Harry in any way, you have to inform Remus and Sirius, because if you don’t I will!”

With that, she turned on her heel, and stormed out of the room! As the door slammed shut, the echo reverberated throughout the room

There was a moment of silence before Severus spoke

“So what happens now?” he growled

Albus appeared weary, but there was determination in his face “So it begins. It’s time to reform the Order of the Phoenix.”

Okay guys, I can’t apologize enough for the long wait. Believe me, I had no intention to wait this long, it just happened that way. This was a very difficult chapter for me to write, because it would determine where I would begin to take the rest of this story, going into Harry’s Spring Semester of his First Year. This particular chapter is my longest one; over 21,000 words, but that’s still no excuse.

I can’t promise when the next chapter will come out, but I will say that I placed some subtle hints about some things to come in the next few chapters. If you want a hint on where to look for those, look at the dates, then go back and look at some of the other dates I’ve given you (ex. When people died, ect). Okay, vague, I know, but I don’t want to give too much away.

I will give you a treat since you’ve been such faithful readers, and haven’t killed me yet for making you wait so long. Wait for it...Wait for...OK, OK, here it is. I’ve decided to PAIR Harry with someone! SURPRISE! I know I said I hadn’t decided on a pairing yet, but I had a stroke of inspiration one day, and decided I had to do this storyline. For those who are wondering, No, it’s not Ginny. This isn’t meant to be cruel, but there is a reason. Your other clue is ‘No’ you haven’t seen her in this story yet, and you won’t for a few more chapters. I think you’ll like it, but I admit it’s outside the box. But hey, I never said I was a traditional writer.

Anyway, I’ll try to get the next chapter out as soon as I can. It won’t be as hard or as long a wait as this one. I promise.

Happy trails,

Midnight Star 25

